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WILDLIFE IN NORTH CAROLINA

NORTH CAROLINA Wildlife RESOURCES COMMISSION

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Intensity on point is reflected in the amber eyes of this German shorthaired pointer. Many shorthairs are as adept with water work as they are upland work. **PHOTOGRAPH BY CHIP LAUGHTON.**

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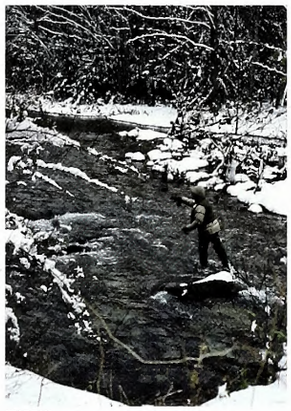
Cover: Black bears are common in the Mountains and Coastal Plain, but are found all across our state. While not looking fleet, black bears have been clocked at 35 miles per hour for short bursts. PHOTOGRAPH BY TODD PUSSER.

Wildlife in North Carolina is the official educational publication of the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission. It is dedicated to the sound conservation of North Carolina's wildlife and other interrelated natural resources and also to the environment we share with them.

EDITOR'S NOTE

Home is one of the dominant themes of the final two months of the year as Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays hurtle toward us and sweep us along like bits of holiday flotsam. Home is in the music we hear, our conversations, our thoughts, television shows. Home for some of us, however, can be a moving target.



JIM DEAN

For me home at times is still that single front porch light burning in the dusk as I'd come home from quail hunting when I was growing up in Granville County. We ate early in those days, and I'd swear I could catch the aromas of my mother's cooking several hundred yards across the fields as my pace quickened toward the light. Sometimes when the light is right and I see a field of golden broomstraw, I think I can still smell it.

I suspect most of us never quite get past the home we grew up in, even if that place is well and forever in our past. We carry about those mental relics of homes past and take them out when we need a piece of home comfort in our present.

These days, my idea of home can be disjointed. I stay in Cary during the week for work and return to Pilot Mountain on the weekends and holidays. In order to have fishing gear at the ready, much of it stays in my truck, which I sometimes consider my practical home. I just don't sleep in it, although the thought has crossed my mind. A camper shell, a mattress and a sleeping bag and I'd be ready to tackle any number of angling adventures.

The meat of my fishing season begins as the temperatures cool and extends through the holiday months and into winter. If there's snow on the ground, so much the better. I've come to think of Thanksgiving and Christmas as a time for trout. Fortunately my wife does not discourage me from this line of thinking. In many ways, a place with a running stream can be as much home as any other place. It just depends on what you're looking for out of life. I don't think I've ever been unhappy in a river. And I've come to rivers unhappy and been gladdened by them.

Thomas McGuane has written of trout anglers that we all finish our lives with but one river, that being an amalgamation of all the rivers we've ever fished. And so we may end our times with one home, too, the memories of happy places never quite lost.

Jim Wilson

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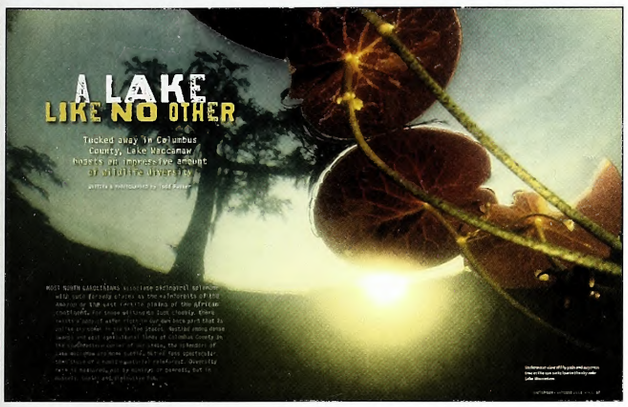

The Biggest Threat to Lake Waccamaw

I enjoyed the wonderful article on Lake Waccamaw. Unfortunately, the biggest threat to the ecosystem of this wonderful lake is not the flathead catfish but the unchecked spread of hydrilla. A threat, which the N.C. Division of Water Resources states that if goes unchecked, could totally choke the lake within five years. Fortunately this agency, along with N.C. State University, has a program in place to try to address this issue. Difficulty is in funding the fight here and other areas of N.C. Florida reportedly spends more than $20 million fighting hydrilla.

Tony Moran
Littleton

Editor: Hydrilla was discovered in Lake Waccamaw in 2011. Approximately 900 acres of the lake are infested with this invasive, aquatic weed. The hydrilla is being treated with flouridine granules. Look for a feature article in Wildlife in North Carolina *next summer on hydrilla in North Carolina waterways.*

I so thoroughly enjoyed the article by Todd Pusser about that state jewel—Lake Waccamaw. For over 50 years I had the privilege of fishing and hunting an area in Craven County with a similar, though much smaller lake—Lake Ellis. I was a member of a fishing and hunting club which owned quite a few acres there, and there were two comparatively large lakes within its boundaries—Lake Ellis with 1,500 acres and Little Lake with about 600 acres. We would wade the shallow lakes fly-fishing, mostly for bream and bass. Absolute heaven! (No more though; I turn 90 this month.) A big bream would drag me all over the lake now!

Lake Ellis is more like Waccamaw as far as its flora and fauna. Little Lake had a lower pH and did not support the vegetation like Lake Ellis. Both Lakes are considered Carolina Bay lakes and through the years, efforts have been made, mostly unsuccessfully, to cultivate the beds.

North Carolina is fortunate to have these unique natural bay lakes. Of course Mattamuskeet is, by far, the largest but all have their own aura of grandeur, and I thank the good Lord for the many wonderful hours I enjoyed on Lake Ellis.

Pusser says that Waccamaw is 9,000 square acres in size! The proof reader missed it in that the acre is a term for an area and cannot be referred to in terms of being squared! Whatever—it's a beautiful thing and all North Carolinians ought to spend some time there.

John W. McAlister Jr.
Charlotte

Birds of Another Feather

Kudos to David S. Lee for another excellent article. However, readers should note that most birds mentioned by Shakespeare don't occur on this side of the Atlantic. English colonists named many birds they found here for English look-alikes. The American robin, for example, may have a reddish-orange breast like the European robin, but our robin is a thrush, while theirs is an Old World wheatear, related to the nightingale, another species not found on this side of the Atlantic.

Colonists in New England thought the ospreys nesting around a certain Massachusetts bay resembled the Old World hawk, buzzard (*Buteo buteo*), so they called the area, Buzzards Bay. Meanwhile, southern colonists linked the soaring behavior of that same hawk with the soaring vultures of the New World, which is why so many people still call the turkey and black vultures, a "buzzard." This kind of species confusion has led to a bad rap for North America's two cuckoo species. Unlike their Old World kin and the three species of cuckoo that live in Central and South America, our cuckoos raise their young in a legitimate fashion and rarely parasitize other birds by laying eggs in their nests and leaving their hosts to raise the young.

George Reiger
Locustville, Va.

The world of nature, and all who knew him, lost a good friend when David Lee left us this summer. I came to know Dave when I often visited him in his office at the old N.C. State Museum of Natural Sciences many years ago. He was quietly passionate about many facets of our natural world, from his beloved ocean-going birds, fish and mammals to the declining long-leaf pine woodlands. Dave was more than an eloquent writer on a wide array of subjects—he was a teacher who we all should even now listen to.

Duane Raver
Garner

Editor: David S. Lee died just as the September–October issue of Wildlife in North Carolina *went to press. A longtime contributor to the magazine, David was a scientist, teacher and naturalist who had what seemed to be an insatiable curiosity about the world around him. In the July-August issue of the magazine he wrote about poison ivy, followed the next month with Shakespeare's birds. In the past few years David has written about the school of forestry at Biltmore, wading birds, bowfins, ferns, lawns (he was against them), snapping turtles, cane and longleaf pine. There was little that did not interest him, and fortunately for us, David—ever the teacher—was willing to share what he knew. All of us will miss him and his ability to educate.*

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The Christmas Squirrel

An unexpected gift and a selfless act, helped make this a Christmas to remember

WRITTEN BY MARTY SHAFFNER
ILLUSTRATED BY GARY PALMER

For a child, Christmas is always a magical time filled with anticipation. As we grow older we can look back on those Christmas memories and some seem to stand out. For me, one of my dearest memories is of my twelfth Christmas. I had become obsessed with hunting and fishing, a passion fueled by reading articles in hand-me-down *Field and Stream* and *Outdoor Life* magazines. For Christmas that year I wanted anything related to hunting or fishing. Times were a little lean that year, due to my mother being out of work, so I didn't expect any big gifts. Sometimes the best things seem to happen when you least expect them.

As I went to sleep on Christmas Eve, the weather was terrible, with a steady and heavy rain falling, making it a nasty, dreary night. As I awoke the next morning and looked outside I was shocked to see that during the night the rain had changed to snow, and the ground was covered with 6 inches of heavy, wet snow. The dreariness of the night before had been transformed into a winter wonderland. The wet snow clung to everything, and I remember the evergreen tree limbs that bowed under the weight of the snow that stubbornly held to them. I should have known it would be a special Christmas.

After opening our presents at my mom's, we walked over to my grandparents' house where we opened some more presents. I'm ashamed to say, but I don't remember any gift I received other than the last one. After everyone had opened their gifts, my mom and grandma were cleaning up the wrapping paper and boxes that lay strewn about by excited children. Like most children, my sister, brother and I were not known for our neatness, especially when you add the excitement of Christmas.

The elation of that day had long since passed, but now it had a renewed place in my heart, and it still holds that dear place to this day.

My grandpa disappeared into his bedroom only to reappear carrying a brand new 20-gauge Springfield pump-action shotgun. He asked, "How do you like my new shotgun?" He strung me along for a while, telling me how he had seen the shotguns on sale at the local hardware store and that he had been wanting a new one because his old single barrel had a broken spring on the firing pin and was out of commission. Then he said, "Oh, wait a minute, that's the one I bought for you." He then went and retrieved another shotgun exactly like the other one and explained that when my younger brother got old enough to hunt he would give that one to him, but for now he would use it when we went hunting. Words cannot describe the way I felt. A 12-year-old boy who wasn't expecting any big gifts had gone to bed on a rainy Christmas Eve night to awake to a snow-covered Christmas morning and a brand new shotgun. Not a bad turn of events.

After some of the shock subsided, my mind quickly turned to trying out this new shotgun. With all the restraint that a 12-year-old could muster, I waited about two minutes before I asked if we could go squirrel hunting and just as quickly my grandpa answered that we could. At heart my grandpa was just as much of a kid as I was. The 15 to 20 minutes it took my grandpa to get ready to go seemed like an eternity.

As we struck out walking from my grandparents' house, I had never been more elated than I was carrying my new Springfield. As we trudged through the wet snow I couldn't quit looking at it. For those of you not familiar with Springfield long guns, they were the bottom-of-the-line shotguns produced by Savage Arms Company, but I wouldn't have been prouder of a Parker side-by-side worth thousands of dollars.

We continued down the road to a small patch of woods about 500 yards from the house. There we eased into the trees, stalking side by side, looking for any movement from a squirrel. I remember the silence of the snow-covered woods. It almost seemed as though we were in a vacuum. We slipped along in silence as the snow quieted our movements. We had covered most of the small woodlot, and it seemed as if our hunt wouldn't produce any squirrels, but again some days just seem destined. We were ready to turn back when suddenly my grandpa said, "Look," and he pointed toward the top of a huge white pine where I saw three squirrels. They had already spotted us and were leaving.

This moment in time almost seemed surreal and I was seemingly frozen, unable to move. My grandpa told me to shoot, and I did.

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Now you have to remember this was my first squirrel hunt. I had fired a shotgun several times, but only at tin cans and such. I had never shot at anything moving, although I had been told how—put the gun on the target and establish a lead, pull the trigger and keep swinging. Being told something and understanding something are two different things. I shot three times and my grandpa shot twice, I think.

The shots broke the silence of the snowy morning, but the noise was quickly absorbed by the snow. Two squirrels fell from the top of that white pine, the one I had been shooting at on the right side of the tree and one from the other side of the tree. My grandpa said, "Let's go get our squirrels," and we walked down the hill toward where they lay. As we arrived at the bottom of the tree my grandpa told me to get my squirrel.

We stood a few minutes admiring our harvest before beginning the walk out. When we got back to the road, we stopped and unloaded our guns before starting out the road back to the house. We walked beside one another down the road, each of us with our shotguns laid on top of our shoulders, holding the stocks by the bottom of the butt and carrying a squirrel in our other hand. There was probably only one set of tracks in the snow down that road because I must have been floating due to my joy! Jack O'Conner was never prouder of an elk than I was of my squirrel.

When we got home my grandpa called everyone outside to admire our squirrels and related to my family what a shot I had made with my new shotgun. I received praise for my accomplishment from my grandmother and mother. After all the commotion quieted down and everybody went back inside we went in the back yard and my grandpa showed me how to clean a squirrel without getting hair on the finished product, a feat that now in my mid-40s I have still yet to perfect. The next day my grandpa and I feasted on squirrel stew and homemade biscuits my grandma prepared for us. Life was good!

One day many years later I was cleaning my pump shotgun when my mind went back to that Christmas morning in that snowy woodlot. As I replayed the morning's events I realized that there was no way I had killed that squirrel myself. I came to see that with all the shots, I hadn't noticed my grandpa had killed his squirrel, then shot at the one I was shooting at about the same time I did and that it was really his shot that had killed it.

At first I was almost angry—my so-called "first squirrel" wasn't really mine. It had been a lie, and I felt almost as if I had been robbed. Then as I began to think more about it, I realized what an unselfish and loving act it was. He wanted me to kill that squirrel just as much, if not more than I did. Suddenly that squirrel meant even more to me than it had before. The elation of that day had long since passed, but now it had a renewed place in my heart, and it still holds that dear place to this day. I never shared with my grandpa that I had figured out what had really happened on our squirrel hunt. I didn't want to change his memory of that day.

My grandpa passed away 15 years ago this past May. At the time, it devastated me more than any other event in my life. A part of me was gone. He was more than just a grandpa—if that wasn't special enough—he was also my hunting and fishing buddy. As we both grew older and grandpa slowed down, I had other hunting and fishing buddies, but after every successful outing I would either go by and visit or call to tell him of fish caught or game harvested.

He was a major influence in my life and is still missed to this day. Life goes on, though, and marriage, children and work make for a busy life. Things change with time. That small woodlot is no more, with a pasture replacing most of it, and where we stepped into the woods that day there now sits a house. A few trees in the home's back yard are all that remain of that patch of woods. In my mind though, there will forever live the memory of a few hours on a snowy Christmas morning, with a man I knew as Pa by my side, a new shotgun and the Christmas squirrel. ◆

Marty Shaffner is a fishing guide and a frequent contributor to WINC.

RICK SNALL

The Rise of the Black Bear

The expansions of black bears in North Carolina is cause for tweaking management practices

Written by Mike Zlotnicki

Black bears, like bison and elk, were part of the North Carolina landscape when settlers arrived in the 1600s. But over the next 100 years or so, conversion of forested land to agriculture, unregulated hunting and other factors caused the eventual demise of the bison and elk and greatly reduced the black bear.

Today, it's mostly a different story. While bison exist here only on commercial ranches, elk have been reintroduced to the mountains of North Carolina and are thriving. Black bears, thanks to conservation efforts started in the 1930s, have rebounded in a huge way. With that rebound have come some changes in the way black bear populations are studied and managed, including a new bear hunting season in the Piedmont of North Carolina. Dr. David Cobb is chief of the division of wildlife management for the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission, and black bear management has been at the forefront of his duties.

"Bears are important because they're both a game species that has a long history in this state, and also because they're in that charismatic mega-fauna category," said Cobb. "They're large mammals that even people who don't bear hunt think are really cool to have on the landscape. One of the reasons I think our bear conservation work is important—and we have a different situation here than arguably any other state in the country, certainly any state in the southeast—is that we have a large and expanding bear population and have worked since the early '70s on the process of perpetuating our bears. Where they occur in the Coastal Plain and in the Mountains they're a key species in the ecosystem."

Cobb said the modern era of black bear management started with the creation of the black bear sanctuary system in the early 1970s. Where we are now with bear populations and bear management in this state is a result of the establishment of the sanctuaries by the commission and a lot of collaboration with bear hunters, private land owners and other partners across the state. Cobb said the partnership between the commission and bear hunters has really been the foundation of the modern era.

TODD PUSSER

Black bears prefer vast expanses of uninhabited woodland or swamp to live. On occasion crop depredation can be an issue, particularly in Coastal Plains habitat.

COLLEEN OLFENBUTTEL/NCWRC

COLLEEN OLFENBUTTEL/NCWRC

"We have a Bear Hunter Cooperator Program, and we try to get as much biological data from bears killed by hunters as possible," said Cobb. "We use what we call 'roving check stations' so instead of having bear hunters bring the bears to a place for us to check them, we have staff, both in the Mountains and in the Coastal Plain, that go to the hunters. Staff have certain routes that they'll run. We have staff that have worked here for 20-plus years and have worked with the same hunt club the whole time. We have a really good working relationship with bear hunters."

Cobb said biologists try to get a tooth from every bear (a premolar), a weight when they can and a whole reproductive tract from a sow when possible.

"We can look at the reproductive tract and see how many cubs they've had by placental scars. You open them up and get an idea of reproduction from the previous year," he said.

A trap being used in the Wildlife Commission's Urban Bear Study awaits final preparation with Asheville in the background. The ambitious five-year study will track the movements of 40 black bears fitted with GPS tracking collars in and around Asheville (see inset).

City population projections produced by the United Nations show Charlotte and Raleigh as growing the fastest among large U.S. cities from 2010 to 2030. Those two cities, along with the Triad and many other towns, sit within the boundaries of what the commission considers the Piedmont; roughly from I-77 east to I-95 and from the Virginia border south to South Carolina. The populations of humans and animals make for a careful balancing act. Deer are great until they eat your hostas. Coyotes are cool until the cat goes missing.

"We did two surveys back several years ago," Cobb said. "One was a bear hunter survey and one was really a landowner-private citizen survey. So, the real challenge is balancing the biological carrying capacity and the social carrying capacity. Hunters are typically after the biological carrying capacity. They want a bear population that persists on the landscape. They want to have a large population of bears over a long period of time. Society, on the other hand, it depends on where they are. People who live in cities don't like a lot of bears in those cities. Some people who live in the country don't like a lot of bears around that might cause damage to their property; others do. You have to balance the biological carrying capacity and the social carrying capacity."

Cobb said the response to the new Piedmont bear hunting season has been mostly positive.

"You know, so far it's been good," he said. "Obviously we haven't had it yet. But we took the proposals to public hearings, and 32 public meetings over a five-year time span to talk about bear management.

It was bigger than just the Piedmont season, but the Piedmont season was part of that. And so then after we had all those meetings and we formulated our recommendations we then took proposed rule changes to public hearings in all nine districts."

~

Colleen Olfenbuttel is the commission's black bear and furbearer biologist. She chairs the commission's Black Bear Committee [BBC]. It is the committee that formulated the direction of future black bear management, put it on paper and sent it to Cobb and then up to the Executive Director Gordon Meyers' office and the wildlife commissioners.

"That 10-year bear plan is the first update to the bear management program since 1982, which was the very first Black Bear Management Program [BBMP] for the state of North Carolina and in 2005 the BBC with Mark Jones at the time being chair," said Olfenbuttel. "Things have changed quite a bit in North Carolina. Not only has the bear population changed for the better, but the landscape has changed with the development and increase in people. The BBC committee said, 'we really need to update the BBMP to reflect the current reality and where we'd like to go.' When I came on in '07 it wasn't ready, and it mainly covered the history and where we had been, and they hadn't gotten to the point of where do we want to go.

"And so when I took over that's what the bear committee focused on: where do we want to go with bear populations. What are our overall goals for the bear populations? We felt we had restored bears in North Carolina and we wanted to stabilize the population. And we based that not only off our expert opinion, but also we looked at some of the studies we had done of public expectations. There had been a human dimensions study done of both hunters and nonhunters in 2005 asking them what they felt about the status of the bear population, if they felt they had just enough bears, too few bears, too many bears in their area; did they want more bears or did they want fewer bears and also what their thoughts were on WRC management of black bears. Did they support our management? Did they support hunting as a management tool? We did that study and pretty much, especially in the Piedmont, the public at that time in '05 said, 'yeah, we've got enough bears.'"

Olfenbuttel said those surveyed did not have a desire for the bear population to increase in the Piedmont. There's that public attitude, and a lack of good bear habitat in the Piedmont. And while bears can adapt to any kind of habitat, good bear habitat is where they can move around, find everything they need to survive and not encounter people that often or at all. There are pockets of habitat that are great for bears, but they're pockets next to high development.

"Between what the public told us and their attitudes, what we looked at in the Piedmont and the habitat there for bears—the Piedmont from the 1800s is not the Piedmont we have now," said Olfenbuttel. "We decided for the Piedmont we wanted to limit the establishment of bears, hence the season. Our goal is not to have a no-bear zone. That's impossible. We've had bears back in the Piedmont since the early '80s. The first documentation was sighted on the N.C. State campus. So bears have been traveling through the Piedmont for many years. How it's changed is we're seeing an increase in the number of bears. As the populations expanded in the Mountains and on the coast, those young bears are looking for a place to live and looking for females to breed with, so they start to come into the Piedmont and for the most part they don't stay because there are no females in most of the Piedmont, but that's changing. We have a breeding population in Johnston County. I have an unconfirmed report of a female with cubs in Chatham County. I'm still trying to track that observation down to confirm it."

COLLEEN OLFENBUTTEL/NCWRC

With the proliferation of trail cameras, Olfenbuttel hopes to see more evidence of female bears in the Piedmont.

"Trail cameras have helped us out quite a bit," she said. "The one issue is that people get used to seeing bears on cameras, and they don't realize that, say, a male bear in Chatham County is different than seeing a female with cubs. From our agency perspective that's a night-and-day difference. If there's a picture of a female bear or one with cubs that's big news. If Piedmont people think that they have

TODD PUSSER

The Bear Facts

Classification Class: Mammalia

Order: Carnivora

Average Size:
Length: 5–6 ft.
Height: 2–3 ft. on all fours
Weight: adult females 100–300 lbs.; adult males 200–700 lbs.

The heaviest black bear on record came from Craven County, North Carolina, and weighed 880 lbs.

Food:
Acorns, berries, carrion, corn, fish, frogs, fruits, grasses, grubs, honey, insects, larvae, leaves, nuts, peanuts, reptiles, roots, seeds, small mammals, soybeans and wheat.

Breeding:
Males are called boars and females are called sows. Bear reproduction depends on delayed implantation. While the egg is fertilized in the summer, it is not implanted in the womb until late fall or early winter. Cubs are born about eight weeks after implantation.

Young:
Young are called cubs. Cubs usually stay with their mother through their first winter. Yearling siblings may stay together for another year. Bears live up to 20 years or more.

Life Expectancy:
Average 4–5 years; few live longer than 10 years. Oldest wild bear documented in N.C. was 27.

Bears live in an area (home range) of 5,000 to 50,000 acres depending on their gender and the quality of the habitat. Ranges often overlap in high-quality habitats.

Male bears sometimes fight each other during the summer breeding season, and young juvenile males are often forced to leave areas inhabited by large, dominant male bears.

documented a female or a female with cubs we want to hear about it."

(To report sow and cub sightings in the Piedmont call Ann May, extension wildlife biologist, at 919-707-0068.)

~

There are more bear-human interactions than many people realize. While there has never been an unprovoked bear attack in this state, there have been a few physical encounters, usually involving houndsmen retrieving dogs. Most encounters are urban and usually involve food.

"Over the last two to three years I'd say we've easily had over 500 human-bear interactions, and that's just what's reported to our district biologists," said Olfenbuttel. "This doesn't include calls people make to their local animal control officer or their local sheriff. The range of interaction is fairly diverse. I'd say most of them are 'there's a bear in my neighborhood,' or 'there's a bear in my trash.' I'd say 95 percent of the calls we get about bears can be resolved through education. Secure your attractant. Tell your neighbors to secure their attractants. Remove your bird feeder. That resolves 90–95 percent of the calls we get. There are a small percentage of calls where we might have to make a site visit to get more information. We really recommend electric fencing around beehives and commercial dumpsters to keep the bears out."

Olfenbuttel said she tells the people that they do have the right to protect their property. If the bear is in the act of destroying their property they do have the right to shoot the bear, but they have to report it to the commission. People can also take advantage of the hunting season to manage bear populations. Outside of the hunting season, they can call on houndsmen to go and chase the bear.

"On crop depredation, especially down east, we ask the farmer if they allow any hunting," she said. "If you don't have bear hunting you're not managing your population numbers, and two, hunting does have a great aversive conditioning effect on bears. Bears that are subject to hunting pressure are more wary of people. A wary bear will live longer than one that's habituated."

Another result of the Black Bear Management Plan is the Urban Bear Study, a forward-thinking study for today's human and bear coexistence that is taking place in Asheville.

"The urban study is exciting because it is a result of that bear management plan. We've been doing 30-plus years of bear studies in North Carolina, but one thing we have a lot of questions about is bears in the urban/suburban areas," said Olfenbuttel. "Most of our data is from bears living in rural areas where they've traditionally been populated. Some bears are now living in suburban-urban areas, and we were getting questions about them and didn't necessarily have the answers. What we're doing to get the answers is a five-year study. That's important, because if you're going to do research on bears, they're long-lived animals. The oldest bear we've ever documented in North Carolina was 27 years old. For the study we're putting GPS tracking collars on bears, and that's how we're monitoring them to see where they move around, how much time they spend in Asheville and outside of Asheville. Not only is it going to give us the answers, it's going to be a great project with which to educate the public. Our goal is [to track] 40 bears. During den season we will check on those bears, check on their reproduction, what kind of dens they are using. We've seen an increase of bears using human structures as den sites. It also gives us a chance to assess the health of the bears and the cubs. We can also replace the battery on the collar."

Clearly, black bears are a species of interest for both hunters and nonhunters. With a growing human population and a growing bear population — about 6 percent a year — it will be a balancing act by the commission to satisfy all parties.

"When people express concerns about bears and bear behavior, they're expressing fear and I tell them, 'yeah, it's always good to be cautious around any wild animal,'" said Olfenbuttel. "I also tell them bears are very tolerant of people, but they're more scared of us than we are of them in most cases, especially if we are hunting them. The only time I've seen them not scared of humans is when someone has been feeding them. I'm proud to say in North Carolina we really emphasize education. We've rarely had to euthanize a bear that's become a problem. It's been years. And it's because we emphasize education as one of our management tools, and I'm proud of that. States that trap and relocate or euthanize bears typically don't have bear hunting." ◆

Mike Zlotnicki is the associate editor of Wildlife in North Carolina. *He may be reached at 919-707-0175 or mike.zlotnicki@ncwildlife.org.*

A mature whitetail buck hunkered down in heavy cover. Not an unusual circumstance late in the season.

TODD PUSSER

WHITETAILS:

Late Season Success

Hunting in the waning days of the year calls for a different way of thinking

Written by Andrew Walters

The mercury was dropping that afternoon, along with the deer sightings, but most notably so were my expectations for tagging a buck that year. It had been a rough season, between the lack of rutting activity, starting college in Raleigh and the epizootic hemorrhagic disease (EHD) outbreak—a strain of the blue tongue virus—earlier in the fall. Before I knew it I was down to my last few afternoons in the stand. I had contemplated staying on the couch in front of the fireplace, or even taking my friends up on the duck hunting invite they offered that morning. I was sure they were seeing more action than I was overlooking a 3-year-old clear-cut with my face into the brisk wind, and I soon began to question my decision.

That all changed when a mature 8-pointer came strutting out a few minutes before dark about 60 yards away. The report of the rifle sounded and in an instant my season went from disastrous to victorious. All the hours put into preparation and the boredom I endured was all worth it when I finally got my hands on those snow-colored tines. The strategies for tagging late-season bucks is fairly simple, but the small things, the minute details, can make or break you. These are a few tips to help you out when the going gets rough.

"The sweetest hunts are stolen. To steal a hunt one must go far into the wilderness where no one else has been, or else find some undiscovered place under everybody's nose."

—Aldo Leopold

Where is he?

The first order of business is to find somewhere that actually holds a buck of the caliber you want to pursue. After all, it's pretty hard to harvest a buck that doesn't exist. These areas tend to be overlooked, unpressured places that most hunters don't consider hunting. Many times hunters ride past these sorts of places on the way to their over-pressured hunting lands. They can consist of clear-cuts, abandoned agriculture fields or fields with standing crops.

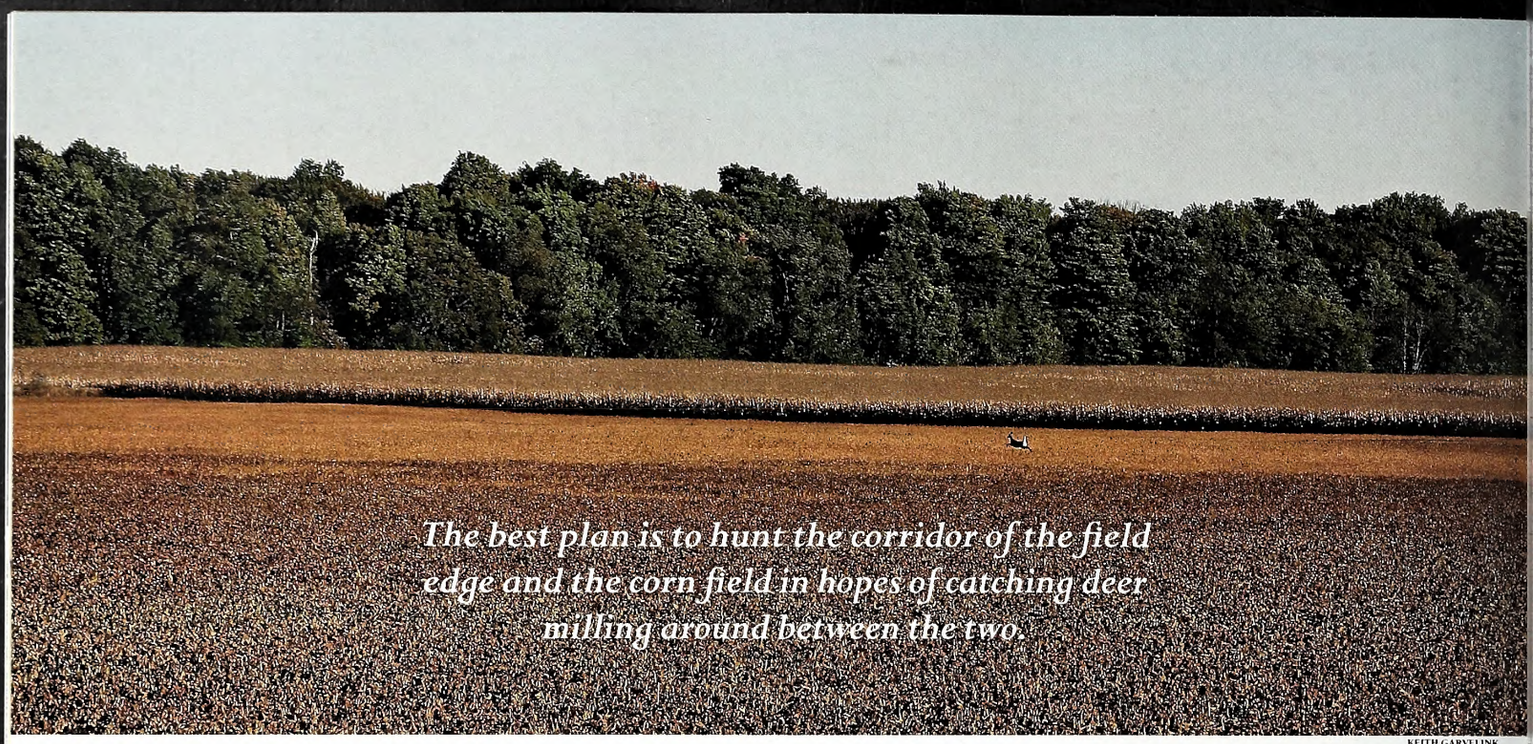
Once you have found an area that holds deer, you should find out if it has been hunted that year, and if so how much pressure was exerted on the area. These are things that should be considered before setting up shop and spending time in a stand. The best way to do this is to set up a trail camera or two in the general area you may hunt. I can't stress the importance of not tramping all through your potential hunting area. The reason bucks are spooky this time of year is primarily because of human disturbance; walking through the woods all afternoon is going to hurt more than it will help. The trail cameras should be set up quickly and quietly.

Unlike early season deer, late-season deer are rarely predictable therefore you may need to check the trail cameras at shorter intervals than you would any other time of the year. If you have a week left in the season, don't go five days before checking the digital card. Check it every other day but be careful of your disturbance. This means that you must be stealthy and as scent-free as possible when entering the woods. If trail cameras are not an option, search for larger tracks and well-used deer paths and travel corridors. Utilize all your resources; try asking a neighbor or the farmer if they have seen any deer sightings recently. Regardless of your technique, be quiet and use your best judgment when entering the woods. Don't forget, late-season deer success is all in the details.

Why is he there?

Bucks are usually skittish about appearing in openings such as fields in daylight hours late in the year, usually because they catch whiffs of human scent sometimes accompanied by a loud bang. Mature bucks are especially weary of this and will strive to stay alive at all costs. They didn't become old and gnarly by being stupid.

The second thing on your agenda is locating food sources. Post-rut bucks are usually run down and have lost much of their body weight due to cruising different areas checking for hot does. According to Kip Adams, a biologist for the Quality Deer Management Association (QDMA) bucks in the Southern states can lose as much as 20–25 percent of their total body weight during the seeking and breeding phases of the rut. This leaves them depleted of energy and nutrients.



KEITH GARVELINK

Irregular shaped fields with soft edges are a deer favorite. Fields that have "hard" edges go straight from crops to timber and offer little to no area of transition. A feathered or "soft" edge consists of shrubs and grasses such as switchgrass, bluestem and pokeweed in between the field and the woods, giving the deer a sense of security when transitioning between the two. Soybean fields are a great place to locate deer if the crop has not been harvested. Soybeans offer less cover than crops such as standing corn, but still provide nutrients useful for the recuperation of exhausted bucks.

Standing corn fields are a late-season jackpot. Corn is full of carbohydrates and can help bucks obtain that extra boost of energy to help them make it through the late season's harsher weather. Standing corn this late in the year is rare and usually is a result of a wet harvest season that has kept farm machinery from the fields. This is a great place for bucks for three reasons. First, they have food; second, they have thermal cover; third, it's nearly impossible for them to be hunted.

The best plan is to hunt the corridor of the field edge and the corn field in hopes of catching deer milling around between the two. If there is a ditch or drainage that separates two fields from one another, this may allow you to set up a ground blind or a stand to overlook the area. The deer won't spend all of their time in the fields and will eventually wander out to the edges. It's up to you to be there when they do. Pay attention when hunting these areas because usually there are only a few seconds to spot the deer and fire a shot before he disappears into the fields again.

CRP (Conservation Reserve Program) fields are ideal locations to find December bucks. These areas consist of many native warm-season grasses and tend to be 4 to 6 feet tall. This allows deer to stay in cover and remain close to agriculture fields, all the while allowing the sunlight to penetrate the growth for warmth. When hunting areas such as this, binoculars are a must. I have scanned areas without seeing anything only to see a few deer seconds later. They will bed down in these fields and wait until just a few minutes before dark to get up and mill around. Many abandoned farmsteads and pastures resemble CRP fields in the sense that grasses and shrubs and grass seeds that were in the seedbed have been allowed to sprout and the fields become fallow. These are areas that many deer, especially bucks, feel safe in December and can be a great place to punch your buck tag.

The most likely places to find a buck in December are clear-cuts. These are areas that have had the timber harvested and logged. Sometimes they are called cut-downs or cutovers. They can be reseeded for future tree harvests, but many times they are left to regenerate naturally. It takes almost a decade for the trees to grow tall enough to shade out the shrub layer and resemble a forest. Until then the clearcut looks more like a tangled, briar-choked pocosin than a forest. It is nearly impossible to walk through once it has started to regenerate, so the ideal time to hunt it is the first few years after logging. This means that you will most likely be hunting over a shrub layer of holly trees, briars, brambles, loblolly pine and sweet gum saplings.

A tree stand will allow a shot to be made into the tangled mess only for a short while; after a few years the land becomes almost impossible to hunt. Once again this offers a substantial amount of cover along with some natural vegetation for the deer to browse on. I have spent many hours overlooking clear-cuts and have had a great deal of success. I save these stands for the late season because I know bucks will gravitate toward them when the pressure builds and the temperatures drop.

When hunting these areas, you may want to re-think your hunting set-up. While I often use a rifle, many times close shots will be presented and the thick cover makes a rifle shot tricky and sometimes unethical. I prefer a 12 gauge with double-ought buckshot, but if a female or youth hunter is taking the shot I will not hesitate to use a 20 gauge with No. 4 buckshot. Sometimes a youth model with a shorter barrel and stock may be easier to move around in tight places and is the best option. Using a shotgun leaves marginal room for shooting error as opposed to a rifle. The downside is the lack of a scope on the firearm. Rifle scopes enable you to see right up to dusk, but you may not be able to see that long if your gun has no scope, cutting your hunt short by only a couple minutes.

How to Fool Him

Regardless of the size or age of the buck you are trying to harvest, you must be smart about hunting him. These bucks didn't make it through

Left, a spooked deer heads for the sanctuary of an uncut corn field. Below, one late-season strategy is to hunt the thickest natural cover in your area. A portable climbing tree stand can be a great tool for this.

the majority of a gun season, sometimes many gun seasons, by making mistakes. By this time of year, I would bet that the bucks have you patterned more than you have them patterned. They have heard many grunt calls, possibly been shot at a few times and seen just about any other trick a hunter has in his playbook. They are weary and extremely cautious. This is why you must always have the wind in your face when sitting in the stand. Always try to be downwind of where you expect a shot to be made. A whitetail lives and dies by his olfactory senses. If you feel the need to use a scent eliminating spray, try it. It can't hurt. I use it every time I sit in a stand, along with being downwind, and rarely get busted.

Most hunters have heard about not hunting at midday, and the truth is, it is horribly boring when there is no deer activity and many people would rather be doing something else. I feel the same way until I check my trail cameras. Many times bucks will move when they are not used to being hunted. This goes back to them patterning you more than you have them. They have learned that every morning before light they hear muffled voices and see flashlight beams, and the same goes for a few minutes after sunset. Rarely are hunters in the woods around noon. I can't count the number of times a buck I would have loved to had a shot at showed up at my stand while I was eating lunch at home. It's amazing how that big buck is "nocturnal" until you see him milling around your stand at lunch. You simply can't kill them if you aren't there.

MELISSA McGAW/NCWRC

Stand entry and exit is critically important. If you scare half the deer in the county away when approaching or leaving your stand it will only be good for a couple of hunts, if that many. You must be careful not to spook any deer away when leaving a stand. I use an owl call to run a doe or smaller buck away from my hunting area if they refuse to leave when the hunt is over. This is a natural sound, so it doesn't scare them away for good, but makes them uncomfortable enough to leave temporarily, giving me time to exit my stand. Hopefully you will see smaller bucks and does when hunting your late season stands, but I recall the stands that I have had the most success in weren't my best stands for deer sightings in general. This time of year the buck are solitary and want only to recuperate and eat. Don't be discouraged if you set up over great buck sign and don't see anything immediately. He may show up, but he probably won't have a harem of does with him when he arrives.

Hail Mary

Many times hunters don't hunt much of the woods on their property, and if they do it is usually just inside the forest edge. Rarely do many hunters venture more than 150 yards from the field edge. This is the time of the year to penetrate that cover. If there are only a few days to hunt left or maybe your last chance to hunt for the year, go ahead and try it. Usually deer know when their security area has been breached, but at this point in the season, what's it going to hurt? It may pay off or it may not, but trying anything is better than sitting in the same old patterned stands. I tend to think of this as a "Hail Mary" attempt at seeing that buck. It usually won't work out in your favor, but you really have nothing to lose, so you might as well slip in the woods and try to make something happen.

The truth is late-season bucks are easier to pattern than bucks in October and November. They aren't wandering from their home ranges as much and usually want to just stay hidden and eat. Finding a buck and playing my cards right has resulted in me harvesting more than a few great bucks only days from season's end. One in particular was aged at 5.5 years old and was taken the last week of the December hunting season. If not for careful planning and not giving up, I wouldn't have had chances at many of these old bucks that I have in my trophy room. Some will tell you that you have to be "lucky" to kill a late-season buck. I believe luck is when preparation meets opportunity. I hope these tips and tactics can be used so you will be prepared to harvest that elusive late-season buck when the opportunity arrives.

Andrew Walters is the resident wildlife specialist with Mossy Oak Properties NC Land and Farms and an NCSU alumnus.

Missy's mission

written by Dalane W. Kitzman
illustrated by Joe Mahler

A Reject Dog Fulfills a Mother's Last Wish

Our momma's dying wish was that her two sons — as different as two men could be and separated by many miles, many years and many layers of misunderstandings — would become friends. Just weeks after Momma died, Missy came into the world to tackle that seemingly impossible task and fulfill our mother's wish.

Missy was a reject. First, by the deeply disappointed owner of her prized Springer spaniel mom who was impregnated by a renegade Cocker, creating a mixed-breed litter of little value. Next, by all who came for free puppies; as the smallest and meekest of the batch, Missy was the last picked. Then, by her new owners who quickly tired of her. My brother, who had never had a hunting dog, reluctantly took Missy off their hands. So it was that the best bird-hunting and companion dog who ever was came to my brother's household.

My brother and I grew up fatherless and had to learn on our own how to hunt on the windswept plains of North Dakota. Hunting dogs were totally unfamiliar to us. We did not have the money, the time or the knowledge for them. We had been our own hunting dogs. We'd beat the bushes ourselves and forge through the thickets and merciless briars. We would search for hours for a downed bird when a keen-nosed hound would have gone right to it. We would come home tired, scraped and scratched, but with our limit of birds, usually pheasants and grouse for Momma to cook in her wonderful gravy sauce.

But only rarely did we hunt together. A straight-laced, college-bound student hoping to become a doctor, I thought myself better than my wild, rebellious, school drop-out younger brother. We had nothing in common but our mutual disdain for each other. I left for medical school and my brother became a truck driver, cementing the distance between us.

I would not realize until later, but my brother learned a lot from his years on the road dealing with difficult and sometimes dangerous people. He'd become calm, wise, responsible, decent, honorable, God-loving, and family-devoted. This was the man who took on the pup nobody wanted.

My brother said he had no idea where to begin training a bird dog. But his gentle, understanding spirit born of a difficult life served him well. He asked others and took their best advice. There was certainly no possibility of sending Missy off to an

expensive training school where the dog comes back fully trained with a framed certificate. His job took him on long hauls throughout the state and he got home only twice a week. Even though dead tired, he would take Missy, a training leash, whistle, and feathered decoy and drive out to the country fields for practice. Missy caught on fast.

My brother called me one day and said Missy was ready and surprised me with an invitation to be the first to hunt with them. I was intrigued at the opportunity to hunt with a 'real' dog and also felt guilty that I'd not visited my brother and sisters since Mom had passed. Skeptical and not expecting much, I booked a ticket home.

Landing in North Dakota with my brother waiting for me instead of my mom was awkward. We didn't have much to say to each other. But Missy broke the ice. Her tail wagged furiously as she nuzzled me sweetly. She immediately won me over.

The next day with my brother and Missy was a sublime experience. He had connections with farmers throughout the state who obviously respected him and allowed us on their vast fields of recently harvested corn and sunflowers, brimming with beautiful, plump, ring-necked pheasants. It was magnificent to see my brother and Missy work the fields together. He was confident and she was precise. Flushing and tracking birds was in her genes. It was clear that she lived for this; she was exuberant, tireless and focused. She combined the best traits of the Springer and Cocker spaniels, and she had a heart bigger than both. She transcended her humble origins. Sometimes I was so mesmerized from watching her work that I forgot to shoot at the birds she flushed. At those times, she would pause to telegraph me a look of dismay and then she'd bound off to find me more.

That evening as we posed with Missy between us and our limit of birds in front of us, the years of misunderstandings and resentments faded away. As my brother and I relaxed on the sofa, drinking a beer and rubbing Missy's ears and belly, we became buddies.

Each fall, I looked forward to that invitation to come and relive the thrill of the hunt, the brotherly companionship and the glory of seeing Missy pursuing her vocation in perfect fashion. Once, we hunted with a friend who had a professionally trained, champion blood line, pure-bred bird dog. That dog bungled every perfect set-up that Missy had carefully arranged for us. It was one of the few times we missed our limit. Twice more with other friends the same scenario played out, until we learned not to hunt with any other dog in the field. Missy needed no help.

Over the years, my brother and I cemented a relationship as best friends; we became an unlikely duo. We relived old times, created new memories, and laughed so hard at each others' jokes that tears streamed freely.

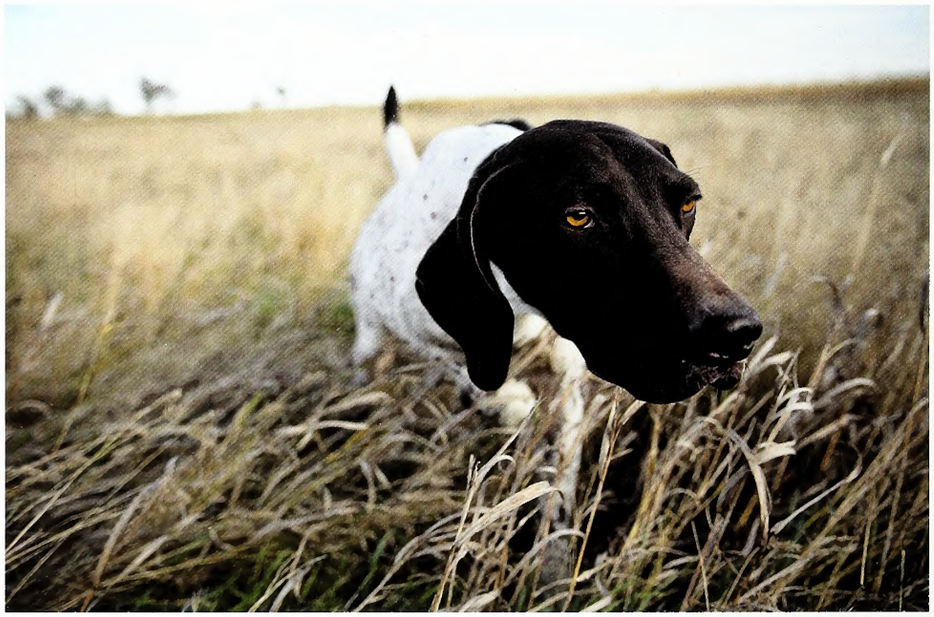
Missy grew old, and recently went on to her Great Reward. On a sofa in a mansion somewhere in heaven, Momma is cuddling Missy and saying, "Thank you, my girl." ◆

Dalane W. Kitzman, MD is a cardiologist, teacher, and researcher who lives in North Carolina. He talks nearly daily with his brother in North Dakota and seeks his advice when faced with dilemmas, having realized that he somehow absorbed a great deal more of their mother's sage advice for such circumstances.

to the point

Photographed by Chip Laughton

Generations of breeding come to the fore for that one moment in the field when the world stands still.



The grasses have turned brown, the leaves have fallen and there's a nip in the air that signals the start of another season of upland bird hunting. Grab your gun, whistle up the dog and let's go.

Every hunter has his own opinion on bird dogs, but that great quail-hunting writer Havilah Babcock had this to say: "For a covey dog, give me a pointer — stamina, dash, derring-do. For a singles dog, give me a setter — patience, thoroughness, precision."

"There is something in the autumn that is native to my blood — touch of manner, hint of mood," wrote American poet Bliss Carmen. Surely the dogs can feel it, and we can, too, as we watch the steady points, the sure retrieves and the return of a beautiful feathered creature.

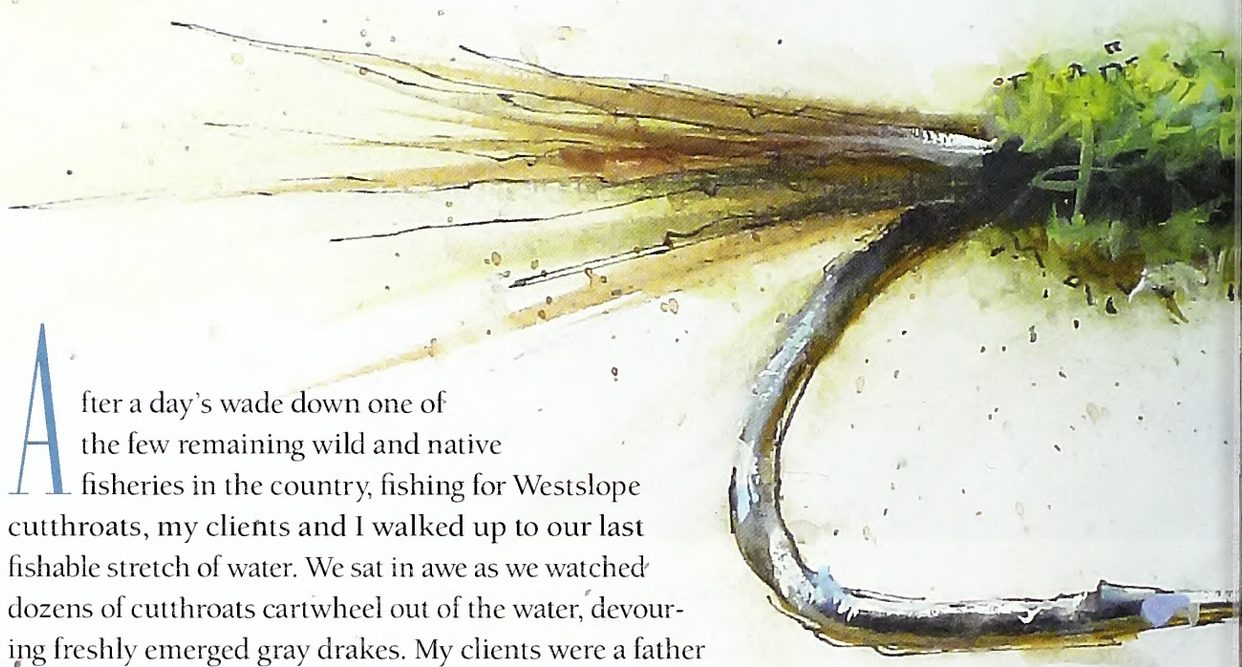
>>>

>>> There is something eternal about hunter and dog in the field, searching for game. The time is now, but it could be 50 years ago. Memories are as apt to take wing as a grouse or quail. Writing of his boyhood, W.H. Hudson said, "I want only to keep what I have; to rise each morning and look out on the sky... from year to year... to feel the same old sweet surprise and delight."

Magic and MADNESS

Wherein a fly-fishing guide reveals his love-hate relationship with the Royal Wulff

Written by Ian Privette
Illustrated by Jeff Kennedy



After a day's wade down one of the few remaining wild and native fisheries in the country, fishing for Westslope cutthroats, my clients and I walked up to our last fishable stretch of water. We sat in awe as we watched dozens of cutthroats cartwheel out of the water, devouring freshly emerged gray drakes. My clients were a father and son who had spent most of their lives fishing the fabled streams and rivers of Michigan. And like many fathers and sons who learned to fly-fish before graphite, they held a nostalgia for the classic tried and true dry-fly patterns—Yellow Humpies, Quill Gordons and Royal Coachmen. I singled out the largest rising fish, inventoried my fly box and selected a pattern that would most match the nearly translucent, gray mayflies.

"HOW CAN YOU BE ANGRY AT A 1-INCH PIECE OF STEEL WRAPPED IN FEATHERS AND YARN?"

I caught a slight grin from the father's face.

"What do you think about tying on a Royal Wulff?" he asked.

My inner guide-self cringed. I've heard horror stories on the South Holston of clients unwilling to switch from their Royal Wulffs even through a blizzard hatch of sulphurs. But this wasn't the South Holston, and these fish were cutthroats. We were in the middle of a feeding frenzy. If something looked like a big meal, something was going to try to eat it. I knew that pattern would work.

So I tied on a Royal Wulff for the father. On the first cast, the biggest fish ate it.

For the past two years, a group of doctors, lawyers and other business associates who call themselves The Royal Wulff Society have shared the South Fork of the Flathead River with me for about a week. The group has one rule: The first fly you have to fish is a Royal Wulff. Only after a fish is caught with that pattern can you change your fly.

One afternoon on the water, I politely informed one of the doctors in the group of my feelings toward the Royal Wulff.

"How can you be angry at a 1-inch piece of steel wrapped in feathers and yarn?" he asked.

"Don't get me wrong; it's a great fly. It catches fish," I answered, "It just makes me angry when fish eat it."

The doctor gave me a puzzled look.

I tried to explain. "I just can't figure out why it works. We just spent the last 30 minutes watching trout feed on spent caddis flies. And that fish, right there, after refusing all my caddis patterns, just ate a Royal Wulff."

"You know," he responded courteously after he set the hook, "I'm not a professional in this field, but I have friends who are, if you'd like to talk to somebody about this ... "

The doctor had a point. Trying to match wits on a daily basis with something that has the brain the size of a pea probably does have some sort of long-term mental and psychological effect. I once watched an 18-inch cutthroat refuse drift after drift of tiny tricos and ants, only to eat a size 2 golden-yellow cottonwood leaf that had fallen into the water. Some days, the most frustrating challenge is trying to get a trout to eat (as the doctor put it) "a 1-inch piece of steel wrapped in feathers and yarn." Others, it's not. A large part of guiding fly-fishermen is paying attention to your surroundings, trying to match the food source and getting a good natural drift. Somehow, a Royal Wulff manages to break all these rules and still catch fish.

The Royal Wulff, according to Ernest Schwiebert in his 1978 book, "Trout," was developed on the Neversink River in New York for L. Q. Quackenbush by modifying his favorite attractor pattern, the Royal Coachman. He wanted a fly that was more visible and floated on the surface longer. The suggested pattern was tied with a hair-wing variation and a brown bucktail and dubbed the "Quack Coachman." (See "Royal Lineage," p. 30.) Ironically, the Neversink River is also responsible for the Quill Gordon, a study in observation and imitation of aquatic insect life. So it seems fitting that a fly pattern born from a river that helped develop the technique of matching the hatch and nicknamed the "Quack" would ultimately come out looking like nothing that naturally floats on top of the water.

I have vivid memories as a kid, standing midstream on the Davidson River and opening up my fly box with the utmost confidence, knowing that row after row was filled with nothing but Royal Wulffs. It was one of the first fly patterns my father taught me to tie. With oversized hackles, extra-long tails and poorly split wing posts, they looked horrendous, like pieces of a horrible toupee attached to a hook. It didn't matter that the proportions were all wrong. All I knew is that they worked. And I had a lot of them, a mentality, unfortunately, that I still haven't outgrown.

On the last day of my trip with The Royal Wulff Society, I took a pair of doctors down a smaller secluded creek that flows into the South Fork. Toward the upper stretches of the creek, the water braids and narrows, providing some fantastic opportunities for big trout in small

water. If you're not careful, you can walk right past fish hidden along the banks, holding in tiny pockets. And in late July and throughout August, grasshoppers can be a sure bet for coaxing larger cutthroat from their shadowy hiding spots.

We came across a small spring that trickled into the creek along the far side of the brushy bank.

"Get a tight drift with your foam hopper and let's see what happens," I suggested. The doctor placed a perfect cast at the head of the tiny riffle. Nothing.

"Try twitching it as it hits the water." Nothing.

"Let's try a tiny black beetle."

The doctor placed an identical cast at the head of the riffle and drifted perfectly down the seam. Nothing. Not a single refusal or flash of color.

"You would think that there's got to be trout hiding in that pocket right?" the doctor commented.

"You would think," I replied, knowing exactly what was coming next.

"Let's try a Royal Wulff, just for the heck of it," the doctor suggested.

I tied on a Royal Wulff for the doctor. As soon as the fly hit the water a 15" cutthroat exploded out of the water and raced downstream with a size 12 Royal Wulff hanging from the corner of its mouth.

There is some sort of magic wrapped into a Royal Wulff. It is spun between the segments of peacock herl and red floss, mixed in among the brown hackles and neatly hidden behind a seamlessly tied whip finish. I don't know what it is. And it drives me crazy. ◆

North Carolina native Ian Privette is operations manager at Spotted Bear Ranch in Whitefish, Montana.

Royal Lineage

"The jauntiness and efficacy of the Royal Wulff has a western, freestoner kind of beauty; it works so well that a whole school of sophisticated anglers will do anything to keep from using it."

—Thomas McGuane, "The Longest Silence"

Size 10 Royal Wulff with CDC wings tied by F.S. "Buck" Ryan of Flies For Rivers.

Written by Jim Wilson & Photographed by Melissa McGaw

Nearly 85 years after its descent from a great American pattern, the Royal Wulff continues to land fish and puzzle those who would find logic in its design

Whether you fish a Royal Wulff or even deign to carry one in your fly box might depend upon your view of what a trout fly should be. If you are of a mind that a fly should imitate an insect at some stage of its life, then you'll not find much comfort with a Royal Wulff. If you are a generalist, one who likes a fly that gives an impression of insect life, such as an Adams, a Humpy or a Partridge and Orange, then the Royal Wulff will be more to your liking.

Except, of course, that the Royal Wulff, more than most attractor flies, gives no general imitation of any insect. It fits into John Waller Hills' description of fancy flies ("A History of Fly Fishing for Trout," 1921), those "which imitate not a species or a genus nor a group, but fly life generally." Although the Royal Wulff is about the shape of a mayfly dun, it is, as Lee Wulff famously described it, "strawberry shortcake" for trout.

RYAN HOUSTON

And it's not only for trout. The Royal Wulff has long been popular for salmon, and it will catch largemouth bass and panfish as well.

The Royal is one of the Wulff series (Gray then White preceded it) that Lee Wulff developed around 1930. Although all of the flies in the Wulff series caught trout when introduced, the one complaint about them from some quarters even then was they did not imitate a specific insect. Preston Jennings, who in 1935 published the classic "A Book of Trout Flies," the first American attempt to take an academic approach to trout and insects, fished Wulff's flies and was impressed with the way they landed trout, but would not include them in his book because they did not represent any particular insect. It's a puzzlement that confounds some people today.

Others of us simply tie on a Royal Wulff and catch fish. The largest trout I ever caught, a 19-inch rainbow, took a size 12 Royal Wulff at the edge of the foam line at the head of pool one cloudy December afternoon. I was using the Wulff as part of a dry-dropper combination, with a size 16 Gold-Ribbed Hare's Ear on the bottom. I thought I was fishing the Hare's Ear; the rainbow thought otherwise.

It is impossible to talk of the Royal Wulff without speaking of its ancestor, the Royal Coachman, the wet fly that angling historian Paul Schullery has called "the first great American fly pattern" ("Royal Coachman: The Lore and Legends of Fly Fishing," 1999). The Royal Coachman was born of the Coachman, a British pattern that has existed since at least 1825 and was first tied by Tom Bosworth, who, properly enough, was coachman to George IV, William IV and Victoria.

John Kirkbride, in "The Northern Angler" (1837), gives what is still the standard dressing: "The body is made of copper-coloured peacock harle; it must be tipt at the tail with gold; put on a red hackle under the wings; and make the wings of a white feather from the under-side of a wild-duck's wing."

Although this original Coachman wet fly lacked the flash of the future Royal Coachman, some of the essential elements were there in the peacock herl, reddish-brown hackle and white wings. The Coachman remained a popular fly throughout the 19th century, as evidenced by the number of anglers who proclaimed their affection for it in Mary Orvis Marbury's "Favorite Flies and Their Histories" (1892). "The Coachman is, perhaps, the most general favorite of any fly used in America," Marbury wrote.

The Coachman has produced any number of variations, prior to and after the Royal Coachman, such as the Leadwing Coachman, Red Tag, Coachman Trude and Hackle-Point Coachman. Although the number of flies with peacock herl bodies is legion, it doesn't take much imagination to see the similarities between the old Coachman and one of the world's great modern flies, the Prince nymph.

In 1878 John Haily, a professional fly-tier in New York, sent some examples of a new Coachman he had tied for a client to Charles Orvis. The angler liked the Coachman very much, but wanted a more durable fly. Haily added a band of red silk midway the peacock herl and added a tail of wood duck fibers. Charles' brother L.C. Orvis christened the new fly the "Royal" Coachman for its stylish dress.

Although the Royal Coachman was much different from the Coachman, Schullery points out that it was similar in colorful dressing to 30 flies pictured in Marbury's book. (Marbury also included the Gilt Coachman and the Orange Coachman and mentioned but did not illustrate the Silver Coachman.) "Most of them are long forgotten," Schullery writes, "further evidence that there is something special and durable about the fly that Haily invented."

(Counter clockwise from top left) The Coachman (tied by Neil Norman) was the progenitor of the line and dates from at least 1825. The Royal Coachman wet fly was the first great American pattern, and the Royal Coachman dry remains a deadly brook trout fly. The Royal Wulff is one of the finest attractor patterns of all time.

The next development in the Royal Coachman occurred in the early part of the 20th century when it was converted into a dry fly, the Fan-Wing Royal Coachman. That fly is attributed to Theodore Gordon, although Gordon, an avid hatch-matcher, was not fond of the Royal Coachman wet or dry. He thought for a time that the dry-fly version resembled a flying ant, although like many other anglers, he was never quite sure what the fly was supposed to represent.

Schullery explains the dilemma: "To the hard-core hatch matcher, the Royal Coachman was, in the words of Ted Leeson, 'an act of vandalism, a grotesque violence perpetrated on a fly box.' The Royal Coachman didn't make sense to these people because they couldn't imagine how it made any sense to trout. That they took it, often quite eagerly, was not reason enough for many fishermen, then or now."

Although the fan-wing version was a very effective fly, the wings were delicate and tended to helicopter when cast and twist an angler's line, especially once they got a little trout slime on them. That led to another innovation, when in 1930 an angler named L.Q. Quackenbush asked his friend and noted Catskill fly-tier Reuben Cross to beef up the Fan-Wing Royal. Cross came up with the Hair-Wing Royal Coachman, replacing the feather wings with white hair from an impala, according to the story. Cross retained the wood duck tail of the original, although that came to be replaced by golden pheasant tippets. The fly became known, and is still called in lore, the "Quack" Coachman.

At approximately the same time, Lee Wulff, one of the seminal figures of 20th century fly-fishing, created the Royal Wulff, which would set off a minor controversy among fly-tiers and angling historians that lingers until today over who deserves credit for the Royal Wulff. The two flies, Cross' and Wulff's were similar, although the tails were different and the Wulff fly was much more robust. Photographs of original Cross-tied hair-wings reveal slimmer, more delicate flies, as befit their Catskills origins and Cross' style.

Wulff preferred bucktail for his flies' wings, but calf tail or calf body hair has become the accepted dressing, although some fly dressers use CDC feathers for the wings. The bucktail wings disappeared, Orvis spokesman Tom Rosenbauer said, simply because "they looked like hell." The tails have remained bucktail, although some tiers prefer moose hair.

Time and custom quickly left the Quack Coachman and the Fan-Wing Royal Coachman in the pages of angling history, but the Royal Coachman dry fly with hackle-point wings still lives on. Considering the fly's history, it's not surprising that Orvis sells both the Coachman dry with hackle points

FLY TYING PATTERNS

Royal Wulff

Hook Standard dry fly, 10-18
Thread Black, 6/0 or 8/0
Wings White calf tail, upright and divided
Tail Brown bucktail
Body Peacock herl with center band of red floss
Hackle Coachman brown

Royal Coachman Wet

Hook Standard wet fly, 10-18
Thread Black, 6/0 or 8/0
Tail Golden pheasant tippet fibers
Wings White mallard quill, splayed
Body Peacock herl with center band of red floss
Hackle Dark brown hen

Royal Coachman Dry

Hook Standard dry fly, 10-20
Thread Black, 6/0 or 8/0
Tail Golden pheasant tippet fibers
Wings White duck quill, upright and divided
Body Peacock herl with center band of red floss
Hackle Coachman brown

Coachman Wet

Hook Standard wet, 10-16
Thread Black, 8/0
Tag Flat gold tinsel
Body Peacock herl
Hackle Dark brown hen
Wing White duck quill

and the Royal Wulff. The Coachman dry is still popular in New England for brook trout, Rosenbauer said.

"Over the years we've had to drop a number of great old flies because no one was buying them anymore," Rosenbauer said. "We keep the Royal Coachman in stock because people keep buying it."

Roger Lowe in his "Fly Pattern Guide to the Great Smoky Mountains" (2005) also lists the Royal Coachman dry as a favorite for North Carolina brookies, along with a variant, which replaces the red silk and the forward band of peacock herl with orange ostrich herl.

The Royal Coachman remains with us primarily through its descendants, those many flies that trace their lineage back to this one great American design. The Royal Wulff is at the top of the list, but there are any number of patterns that owe their birth to the Royal Coachman. A short list would include the Royal Trude, the Parachute Royal Coachman, Royal Stimulator, Wright's Royal, Dr. Kirgen (first tied by Leonard Halladay, who developed the Adams), Royal Coachman Trude, Old Gray Mare, GTH Variant (a mixed parentage of the Royal Wulff, a Humpy and a House and Lot) and Beetle Bug. There are even soft-hackled versions of the Royal Coachman (Scottish tier Davie McPhail makes a beautiful example of this fly) and a tenkara Royal Wulff.

History aside, the overarching question about the Royal Wulff and the Royal Coachman is why they have caught trout so successfully for nearly 140 years. In 1956, Jennings believed he had solved the mystery of the Royal Coachman and published a story in *Esquire* magazine, "There IS a Royal Coachman," explaining his theory that the wet fly imitated *Isonychia* bicolor nymphs. Arnold Gingrich, founding editor of *Esquire* and a dedicated fly-fisherman, wrote that Jennings should be elected president simply because he had seemingly solved the riddle of the Royal Coachman.

Jennings, who created a nymph pattern using Royal Coachman colors, concluded: "For late-evening fishing, tie on a Royal Coachman Wet or Dry, and the chances are you will take fish; besides, you will be a purist of the first water, for the natural insect *does* exist."

As Schullery points out, however, the *Isonychia* connection is only a small part of the fly's attraction, because the Royal Coachman also works well when there are no insects on the water that resemble it.

John Gierach, probably the most popular fly-fishing writer around these days, makes a similar point about the Royal Wulff in "Good Flies" (2000): "I wish I could describe when and where a Royal Wulff will catch fish, but that's pretty much unpredictable. I've had them work when there were no bugs on the water and no fish rising, but I've also had them work better than a more accurate fly during a hatch. It's a mystery."

Gierach admitted to once having a problem with the Royal Wulff. "For years I tried not to like the Royal Wulff. I prefer flies that look something like real bugs. . . . But the Royal Wulff probably ties with the Adams as the most popular dry fly of the past fifty years, and you just shouldn't ignore something like that. Also, fishing a pattern that works even though it violates all your well-considered beliefs about flies seems profound and has a way of putting things into perspective."

A recent theory about the success of the Royal Coachman, the Royal Wulff and a number of other flies that have a history of success can be found in F. Reed Curry's "The New Scientific Angling: Trout and Ultraviolet Vision (2009). Trout, like many other animals, can detect ultraviolet light, although there is some disagreement among biologists as to how much, if any, ultraviolet vision salmonids retain as they age. With dozens of photographs, Curry illustrates these flies as seen in visible light and ultraviolet. The results in many cases are startling, particularly with the Royal Coachman, and by association, the Royal Wulff.

Curry writes: "I will now be so bold as to suggest that . . . the white, highly UVR [ultraviolet reflecting] wing in conjunction with the UV absorbent peacock herl provides all the visibility and feeding triggers that a trout needs. The key, then, to the perennial success of the Royal Coachman series of flies is its UV signature. The same might be said for the Coachman, Prince Nymph, and Zug Bug—all very 'taking' patterns, all sharing certain UV characteristics."

One of the simple answers given for the success of the Royal Wulff, at least among anglers, is that it is a very visible fly.

How Well Do Trout See?
See Nature's Ways, page 43.

The Royal Wulff, like any fly, is not the answer for every angling situation. There are times when it will work and times when it will not. It is a wonderfully successful searching fly in rough waters when there is no hatch or when there are few insects about, which describes a good portion of our North Carolina streams.

The questions that remains, however, is why has the Royal Wulff remained so successful for so long when so many other flies have passed into history. Most of the patterns in Marbury's encyclopedic compilation are foreign to modern anglers. One, the Alexandra, was so successful, such a killing fly, that it was banned on some British rivers. Marbury says "it may not be properly called an artificial fly" because it is a minnow imitation. And the Alexandra so thoroughly offended Frederic Halford, the late 19th century champion of the dry fly, that he cursed it "as a dreadful scourge to any water." Yet, the Alexandra withered away and is today an historical artifact.

One of the simple answers given for the success of the Royal Wulff, at least among anglers, is that it is a very visible fly. It is

JOEL ARRINGTON

The Royal Wulff is a great searching pattern on rough waters. In many of North Carolina's freestone streams, it can be teamed successfully with a hard-bodied ant for a productive day of fishing.

indeed. That's one reason I fish it. I can see a Wulff into early twilight. But I also can see a Parachute Adams, an Ausable Wulff, a Trude, a Parachute Hare's Ear or a Klinkhammer among others.

For anglers, as trivial as it sounds, part of the popularity stems from the name. No matter how democratic one might be, the word "royal" always carries some allure. (Surely L.C. Orvis stumbled upon a moment of marketing genius when he christened Haily's improved Coachman "royal.") Add to royal the name of Wulff, a towering figure in fly-fishing and you have a winning combination, for which we can thank Wulff's longtime pal Dan Bailey, since Wulff's original name for the fly was the Bucktail Coachman—certainly not much panache there.

So we can see the Wulff on the water, its name is pleasing to the ear, but so what? Other flies have Wulff or royal in their names, but haven't had nearly the success of the Royal Wulff. Simply put, the fly catches fish. And because of that anglers have put their faith in it and developed confidence in it. There are anglers who fish the Royal Wulff (or some other fly) to the exclusion of everything else. These fellows match every hatch with their favorite fly, be it Wulff, Adams or Grizzly King. There's an old saying: Beware the man with one gun or one fly. The intimation is that he knows how to use it.

Dave Hughes, author and fly-tier, says in "Trout Flies: The Tiers Reference" (1999): "If you look, you'll nearly always find a logical reason behind the success of a searching fly."

And Hughes perhaps comes as close as any to explaining the mystery of the Royal Wulff in the same book when he relates an anecdote from a visit to a biological field station where scientists had dug a trench beside a trout stream and installed a viewing window. Hughes and a friend watched in vain one day for trout or insects, but seeing none, decided one of them should cast a Royal Wulff while the other watched from the trout's point of view.

"The white wing was disembodied from beneath," Hughes writes. "It did not show much. The surprising thing was the way the bands of peacock herl and red floss that make up the body of the fly melded themselves into segments of dark olive and dark brown. The Royal Wulff seen from beneath the water where trout lurk looks little like the fly held in the hand. That is perhaps key in understanding its success: It looks great to us above the water and gives us confidence when we cast it, yet it also looks buggy and edible when viewed from beneath by the trout."

So what we have is a fly that looks good in the hand and in the water, pleasing both to the angler and the trout. Is that merely a happy accident or the product of genius? The only true answer to the mystery of this fly would have to come from trout, and they're not talking, except when they take the Royal Wulff once again.

Jim Wilson is the editor of Wildlife in North Carolina *magazine. He may be reached at jim.wilson@ncwildlife.org or 919-707-0177.*

Reptiles ... mammals ... bugs ... birds ... Are they

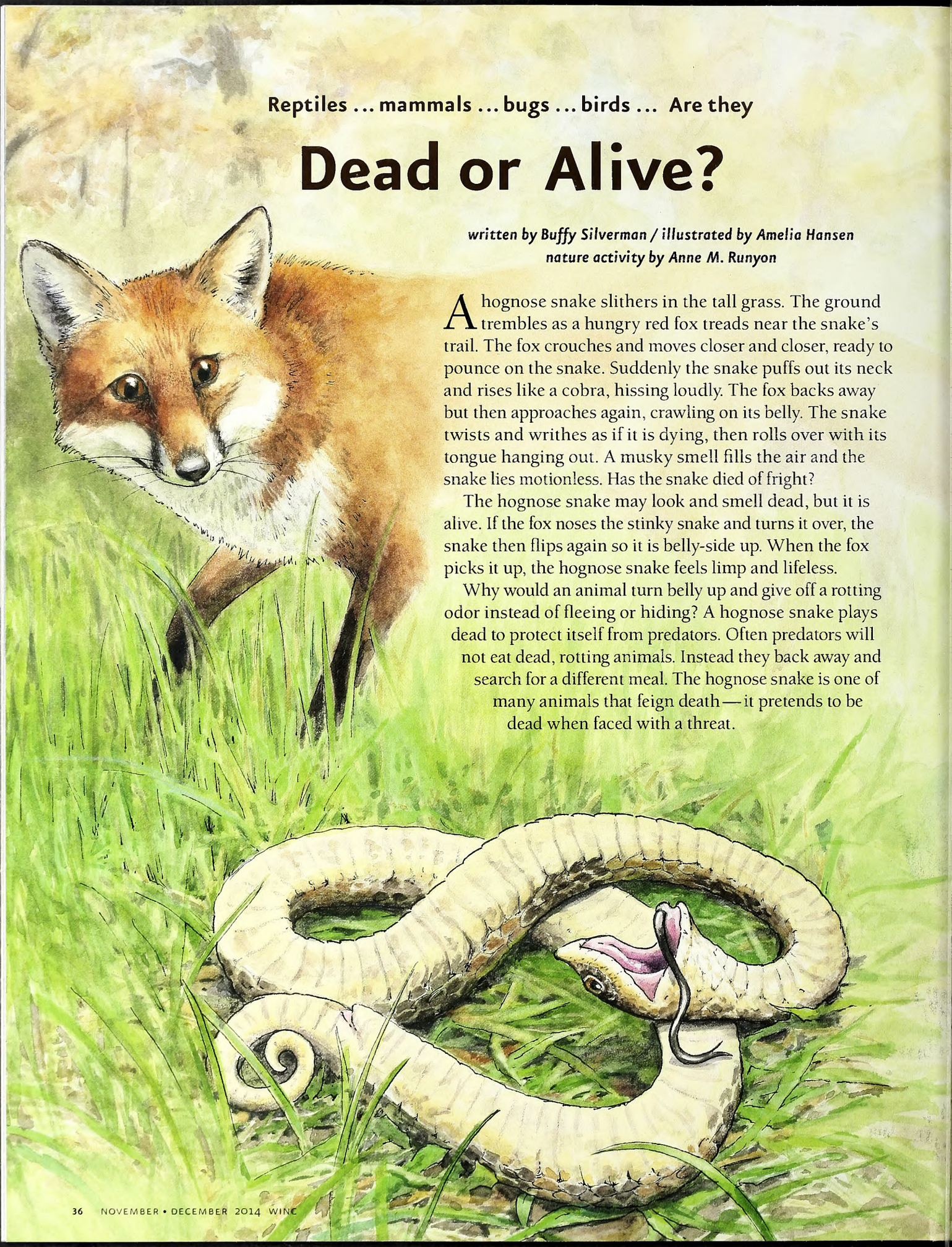
Dead or Alive?

written by Buffy Silverman / illustrated by Amelia Hansen
nature activity by Anne M. Runyon

A hognose snake slithers in the tall grass. The ground trembles as a hungry red fox treads near the snake's trail. The fox crouches and moves closer and closer, ready to pounce on the snake. Suddenly the snake puffs out its neck and rises like a cobra, hissing loudly. The fox backs away but then approaches again, crawling on its belly. The snake twists and writhes as if it is dying, then rolls over with its tongue hanging out. A musky smell fills the air and the snake lies motionless. Has the snake died of fright?

The hognose snake may look and smell dead, but it is alive. If the fox noses the stinky snake and turns it over, the snake then flips again so it is belly-side up. When the fox picks it up, the hognose snake feels limp and lifeless.

Why would an animal turn belly up and give off a rotting odor instead of fleeing or hiding? A hognose snake plays dead to protect itself from predators. Often predators will not eat dead, rotting animals. Instead they back away and search for a different meal. The hognose snake is one of many animals that feign death—it pretends to be dead when faced with a threat.



PLAYING 'POSSUM

Have you ever pretended to be asleep so that no one would bother you? If you have, someone might accuse you of "playing 'possum." But you probably can't play 'possum as well as a Virginia opossum does! When a predator attacks an opossum, the opossum's first response is to bare its sharp, pointed teeth and hiss, growl or screech. Often it runs to the nearest tree and climbs to safety. If an opossum cannot escape or scare off an attacker, it falls on its side and freezes, feigning death.

With its mouth open and tongue hanging out, the opossum looks dead. The drool, feces, urine and horrible smell coming out of the animal add to its convincing display. An opossum might lie on the ground for a few minutes or for several hours. When it thinks the danger has passed, it wiggles its ears and listens for danger. Then it picks up its head and looks around. If the coast is clear, the opossum scurries away. But if a predator is near, the opossum flops down and feigns death again.

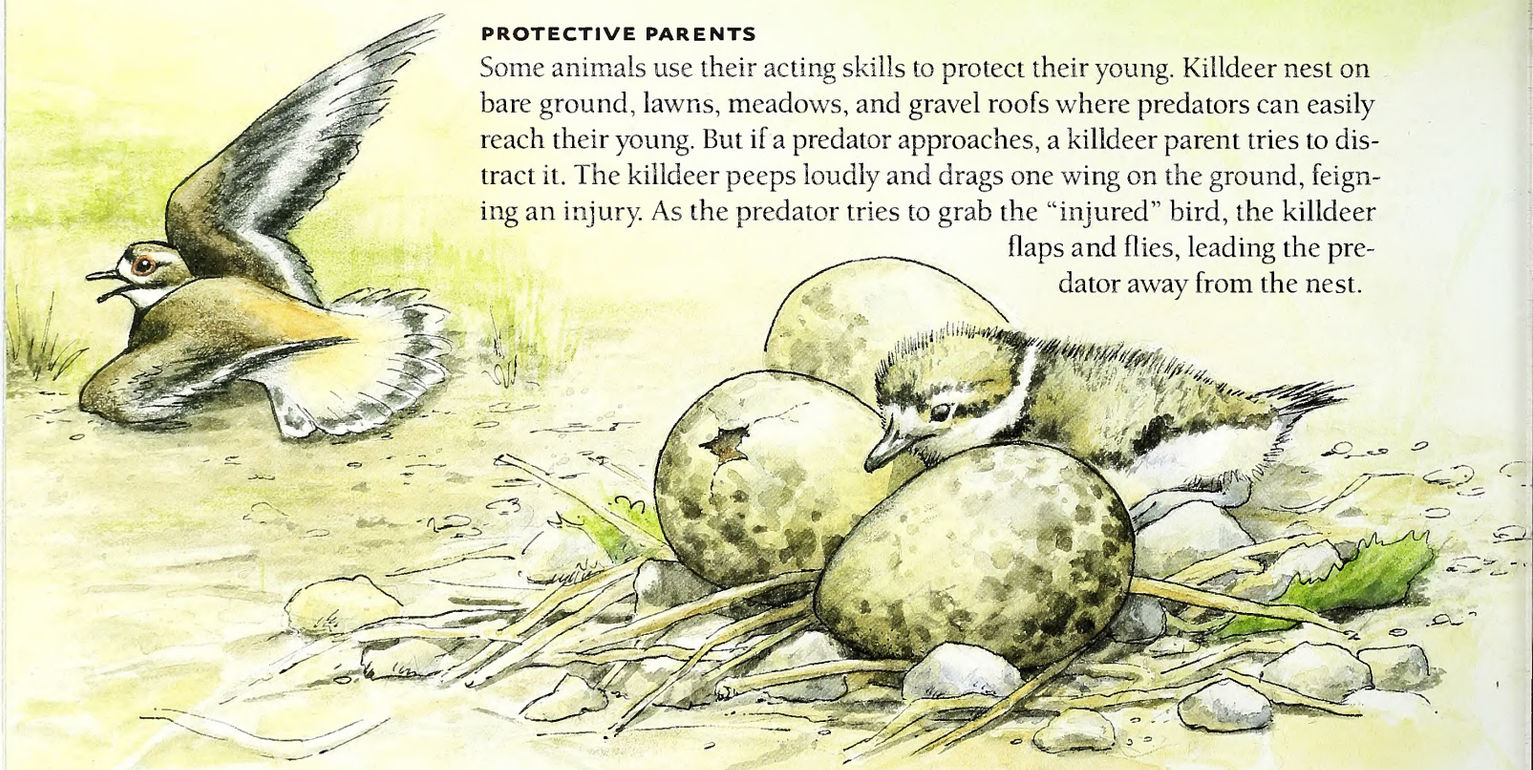
BATTLING BUGS

You might not expect a ferocious insect like a fire ant to feign death. Fire ants bite and sting as they battle neighboring ant colonies, often fighting to the death. But young fire ants with little fighting experience and soft bodies are unlikely to survive these battles. Some of the young ants flee. The youngest fire ants feign death during a battle. They wait until danger has passed before crawling away.

Ants also attack other insects when they hunt for food. The forked fungus beetle is one insect that a hungry ant will try to capture. The fungus beetle spends its days hidden under tree bark or on shelf fungus. With its bumpy, dark body the beetle looks like tree bark. Its camouflage and hard shell protects it from some predators. If an ant or other predator attacks, the beetle plays dead. It tucks its antennae and legs close to its body, making them hard to grab. After a while the beetle checks to see if the danger is gone by waving one antenna and smelling for predators. If an ant is still present, the ant grabs on to the beetle's antenna. Then the beetle sprays a chemical from its rear end that burns and irritates its attacker. The ant lets go and the beetle escapes.

TRICKY SPIDERS

Not all death-feigning animals are avoiding predators. Male nursery web spiders sometimes play dead when they mate. A male nursery web spider woos his mate with a gift of a fly or other insect wrapped in silk. While the female unwraps the insect and starts to eat it, the male tries to mate with her. But sometimes the female spider threatens a male. Then the male collapses while still gripping his silk-wrapped gift. The female drags the gift with the death-feigning male attached as she crawls away. When she stops to unwrap the gift, the male tries to mate again.



PROTECTIVE PARENTS

Some animals use their acting skills to protect their young. Killdeer nest on bare ground, lawns, meadows, and gravel roofs where predators can easily reach their young. But if a predator approaches, a killdeer parent tries to distract it. The killdeer peeps loudly and drags one wing on the ground, feigning an injury. As the predator tries to grab the "injured" bird, the killdeer flaps and flies, leading the predator away from the nest.

Get Outside

How do animals that live near you stay safe? Carefully observe animals in your yard or garden to discover some of their tricks. Can you spot camouflaged insects that look like bark, leaves, or sticks? Brightly colored insects may be advertising that they taste bad. You might find other animals that dart and flee or startle predators with a flash of bright coloring. Maybe you can discover an animal playing 'possum in your backyard!

Read and Find Out

- "Animal Defenses" by Christina Wilsdon, Chelsea House Publishing, 2009.
- "Hognose Snakes" by Adele Richardson, Capstone Publishing, 2003.
- "How Do Animals Stay Safe?" by Faith Hickman Brynie, Enslow Elementary, 2010.
- "Opossum at Sycamore Road" by Sally Walker, Smithsonian Backyard Books, Soundprints, 1997.
- "What Do You Do When Something Wants to Eat You?" by Steve Jenkins, HMH Books for Young Readers, 2001.

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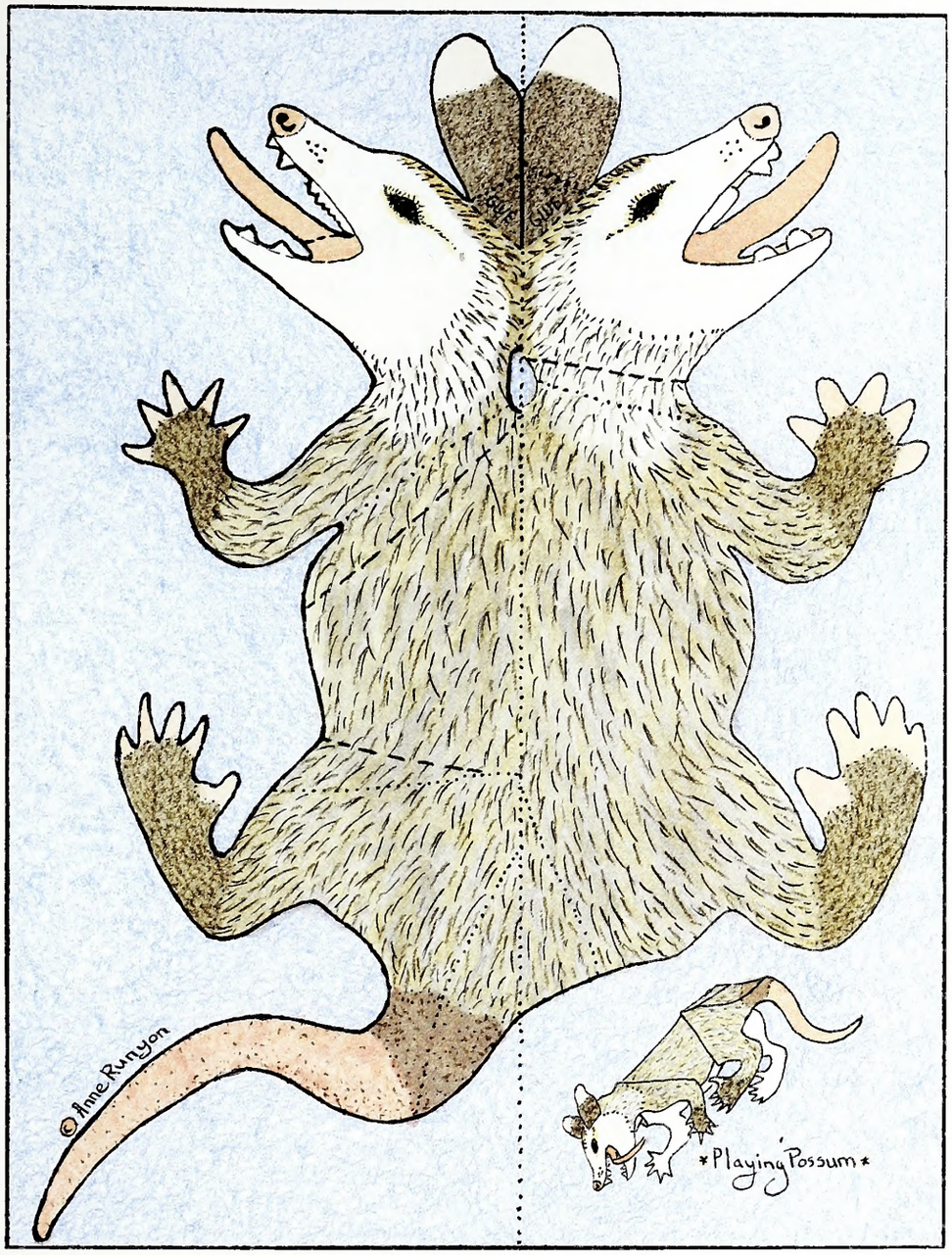

1) Copy art on 24lb paper at 125%.

2) Cut out box and fold in half.

3) Cut out 'possum along black lines, cutting away the blue.

4) Unfold. Carefully cut along black line between ears. Cut away the extra tail.

5) Fold down along all ····· lines and up along all ----- lines.

6) Glue both sides of head together. (Glue nose, tongue and lower jaw.)

7) Glue each ear base to head.

8) Fold tongue up along ----- line.

9) Gently curl tongue, feet and tail to sculpt your "dead" opossum.

back porch

NEWS and NOTES

Edited by Mike Zlotnicki

Wildlife Magazine Rated Best In The Nation

When *Wildlife in North Carolina*, the magazine published by the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission, was named this year as the nation's best in its category, it reflected more than just accolades as a quality publication.

The award also reflected the determination of a dedicated staff to find business sustainability in a rapidly changing marketplace. As the magazine was presented the first-place plaque by the Association for Conservation Information (ACI) late last summer in Nebraska City, Neb., editorial staff recognized the achievement both professionally and personally.

"Beginning about four years ago, the magazine began to move toward self-sufficiency," said Jim Wilson, editor. "We had to operate differently and market ourselves creatively. We had to — and must continue to — do so without losing the high standards of quality our readers expect."

Wildlife in North Carolina began circulation in 1937, pre-dating the formation of the Wildlife Commission by a decade. The magazine is known for exceptional color photography and great articles on hunting, fishing, natural areas, wildlife research and conservation.

"We transitioned from a monthly to a bi-monthly circulation model, but added bonus spring and fall outdoors guides that carried advertising, which regular issues traditionally haven't had, giving us a revenue source," Wilson said. "These special issues highlight fishing, hunting and outdoor recreational opportunities across the state. We cut expenses. After a number of years of gradually declining subscriptions, our circulation figures have leveled off while other magazines are simply trying to maintain a subscriber base." Outsourcing expenditures were all but eliminated. Contract negotiations for printing, postage and circulation generated additional savings. Efficiencies in staff assignments and responsibilities resulted in staff reductions from nine full-time positions to six. Over the past four years, the agency has reduced the annual operating costs for the *Wildlife in North Carolina* magazine by half, while increased revenue generation from subscriptions and advertising has the publication approaching financial self-sufficiency in 2014.

The Wildlife Resources Commission now relies on marketing efforts such as distributing sample magazines and other promotions featured on the agency's social media platforms, as well as utilizing email, print and digital marketing and advertising sources to spread the word of the award-winning publication.

Among the changes coming to the magazine, is a digital version of *WINC*, which should be available some time in 2015.

"We understand in order to succeed like a business, we must act like a business," said Jenny Harris, Wildlife Commission marketing director. "Getting out in the public, whether at trade shows or special events, we get one resounding comment from folks who tell us that our magazine has been a part of their family for generations. Our *Wildlife in North Carolina* staff takes great pride in being a North Carolina staple and we are examining our audience more than ever to cultivate content that reaches an increasingly diverse readership. Not only are we generating promotions that are boosting our subscriber count, but we are doing so with techniques that are done at the lowest cost possible, while yielding the highest rates of return."

Subscribers receive six issues a year, plus spring and fall outdoor guide special editions with the latest hunting, fishing and sportsman information. One-year subscriptions are $12 and three-year subscriptions are $30, which make it a bargain and great gift idea. Subscription information may found on the Wildlife Commission's website at ncwildstore.com/magazine.html or call 919-707-0285.

e NEWSLETTER

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Ducks Unlimited Steps Up With Shotguns

NCWRC

Jay Taylor, left, of N.C. Ducks Unlimited, presents a youth-model shotgun to Travis Casper of the NCWRC.

North Carolina's Hunter Education Program recently got a very generous—and useful—donation from the state chapter of Ducks Unlimited, in the form of eight shotguns.

"Ducks Unlimited is committed to maintaining a partnership with the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission to get more youth involved in conservation," said Jay Taylor, the chairman-elect of North Carolina Ducks Unlimited. "That is a commitment we take seriously. These small-bore shotguns will provide pathways to participation, as we work to engage the next generation in shooting sports, and help us maintain the tradition of hunting in wildlife management for years to come."

Ducks Unlimited is the world's largest non-profit organization dedicated to conserving North America's continually disappearing waterfowl habitats. Regional initiatives, such as donating shotguns to the Hunter Education Program, function to connect people and resources with critical habitats. That in turn helps the North Carolina chapter of Ducks Unlimited in sustaining waterfowl and wetlands habitats.

The shotguns have been distributed to Wildlife Commission staff for use in statewide workshops and special events.

"Thanks to the North Carolina chapter of Ducks Unlimited, our volunteers and other conservation partners, more than 25,000 people completed hunter education instruction last year," said Travis Casper, Hunter Education Program coordinator. "In the Wildlife Commission's strategic plan, the agency is tasked to feature strong partnerships with other natural resources entities to complement our mission. Which is another way of saying we can't do it alone. The state chapter of Ducks Unlimited has once again demonstrated they will not only provide the tools, but people, who give their time to help in all aspects of promoting conservation and outdoor recreation."

The Hunter Education Program provides free hunter education courses throughout the year in all 100 counties, with certification recognized throughout North America. The Hunter Education Program's Home From The Hunt™ campaign is recognized as a national leader in promoting hunting safety and tree stand safety. For more information, call 919-707-0031.

North Carolina Ducks Unlimited also has initiated a new campaign to engage more youth in outdoor activities and hunting, called "Sportsmen for Tomorrow," Taylor said. The campaign will utilize social media, especially Facebook.

Commission Presents Angler With Lifetime Fishing License

The N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission, along with Neuse Sport Shop and the N.C. Council of Trout Unlimited, presented Riley Halstead, of Pilot Mountain, with a lifetime freshwater fishing license at the agency's business meeting in Raleigh last July.

Halstead, 7, received her lifetime license as part of a statewide drawing for participants in 39 kids' "Fish for Fun" events, which were in held in May and June in celebration of National Fishing and Boating Week 2014. The Wildlife Commission also drew names for fishing-related prizes to send to 322 other young anglers across the state—from rods and reels and tackle boxes courtesy of Neuse Sport Shop to mini tackle boxes, T-shirts and fishing hand towels from the commission. Wildlife Commission Chairman Jim Cogdell presented Halstead with her certificate and lifetime license—a $250 value paid for by N.C. Council of Trout Unlimited. A rising third grader at Westfield Elementary School in Surry County, Halstead attended the meeting with her parents Kristi and Ron, and siblings Mack and Piper.

MELISSA McGAW/NCWRC

Riley Halstead of Pilot Mountain is flanked by Ned Jones (L) from Trout Unlimited, Russell Rhodes from Neuse Sport Shop and Wildlife Commission Chairman Jim Cogdell.

Halstead won the license after registering for the drawing at the June 7 Kids' Fishing Derby at Pilot Mountain State Park. Although it was her first time fishing, Halstead comes from a family of anglers, so she expects to put her freshwater fishing license to good use. In addition to Halstead, another young angler, Tyler Bristol, 8, of Clemmons won a sportsman/coastal recreational fishing license after registering for the drawing at the Albemarle Parks Fish for Fun Day at City Park during National Fishing and Boating Week.

Bristol's license, which was donated by Neuse Sport Shop and is valued at $450, gives him statewide fishing privileges in all public waters from the mountains to the coast, as well as hunting privileges.

Since 2001, the Wildlife Commission, along with partners such as Neuse Sport Shop, N.C. Council of Trout Unlimited, and the U.S. Forest Service has supported these free fishing events during National Fishing and Boating Week to promote fishing.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

December 4–6

The 5th Annual WNC Fly Fishing Expo is set for Dec. 5 and 6 at the WNC Agricultural Center in Fletcher. This fly-fishing extravaganza provides anglers a forum to sharpen their skills and learn about the latest innovations in their sport. It's become one of the Southeast's premier events for fly-fishers, averaging more than 1,000 visitors over the course of the weekend. The expo will feature local fly shops, angling organizations and fly-fishing art. Go to wncflyfishingexpo.com for more information.

December 6–7

The Core Sound Decoy Carvers Guild is dedicated to the preservation of the waterfowl carving heritage that runs deep through the history of the Core Sound area in North Carolina. The 27th Annual Core Sound Decoy Festival will be held at Harkers Island Elementary School. The Core Sound Waterfowl Weekend, an annual celebration of heritage at the Core Sound Waterfowl Museum & Heritage Center allows the Harkers Island community to welcome everyone to experience the natural beauty and maritime heritage of the area. Visit decoyguild.com and coresound.com for details.

December 12

Come to the John E. Pechmann Fishing Education Center in Fayetteville to learn how to make a fishing lanyard. Fishing lanyards are the lightest, most efficient way to carry fly-fishing tools and equipment for fast access, particularly on hot days. Lanyards are used to help the angler carry and organize items such as line nippers, fly boxes, forceps for hook removal, tippet material, hooks and extra weights. Go to ncwildlife.org/Learning for more information.

Readers should check with the contact listed before traveling to an event. Items for listing should be conservation-oriented and should be submitted at least four months in advance to mike.zlotnicki@ncwildlife.org, or call 919-707-0175.

Linda Pearsall Receives Prestigious Wildlife Conservation Award

Linda Pearsall, a life-long conservationist and architect of partnerships benefitting wildlife, received the Thomas L. Quay Wildlife Diversity Award in August, one of the most prestigious awards given by the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission.

The Commission presents the award annually to individuals who make outstanding contributions to wildlife diversity in North Carolina and who are considered leaders in wildlife resources conservation. Pearsall, of Raleigh, accepted the award along with a framed print, from Commission Executive Director Gordon Myers at the agency's business meeting in Raleigh.

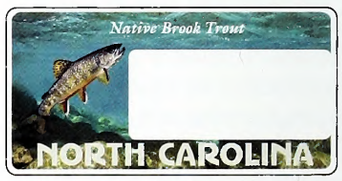
"Linda has made countless contributions to wildlife and their habitats, many of which directly benefit imperiled species," Myers said during the presentation. "Also under her leadership, numerous partnerships have been developed with other agencies, NGOs and landowners. Each of these partnerships has accrued long-lasting conservation benefits to North Carolina."

Pearsall retired earlier this year after more than two decades as director of the North Carolina Natural Heritage Program in the Department of Environment and Natural Resources. As NCNHP director, Pearsall oversaw a professional staff of 25 and advised politically-appointed boards to help shape conservation legislation, policy and practice.

Pearsall is well known throughout conservation circles for forging strong partnerships with state, federal and private organizations, including the Wildlife Resources Commission, to share resources and conduct projects that have conserved thousands of acres in biologically significant areas like Chimney Rock, Grandfather Mountain, South Mountains Game Land and many other game lands, state parks and natural areas, through Natural Heritage Trust Fund grants.

"When I was informed about receiving the Quay Award, I was astonished to hear my name was being added to the list of winners," Pearsall said. "It is an amazing honor and I hope the award continues to foster good relationships and partnerships in conservation across North Carolina." Pearsall is the ninth person to receive the honor. The first recipient was the late Dr. Quay himself, a former professor of zoology at N.C. State University.

Special License Plate to Benefit Brook Trout



Brook trout are the only native coldwater trout in North Carolina. These trout generally exist in cold, clean mountain streams above 1,500-feet in elevation; however, most populations of wild brook trout are in streams over 3,000-feet in elevation.

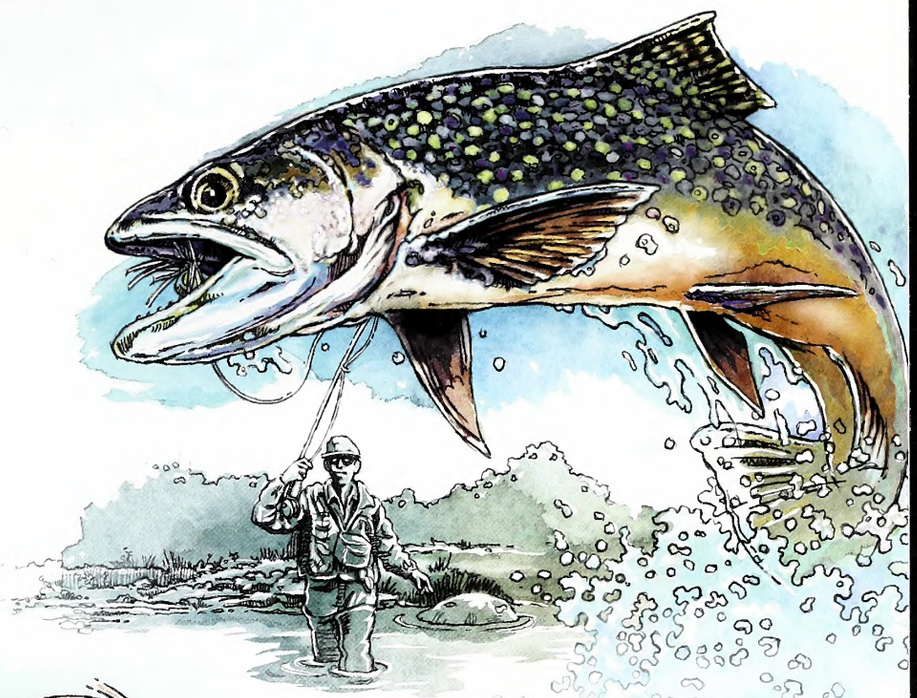
In 2013, the General Assembly authorized the creation of a special license plate to promote the Native Brook Trout. All proceeds from the sale of this plate will be transferred to the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission to fund public access and habitat protection of brook trout waters in the state. (The final design will be very similar to the prototype pictured.)

The Commission's 2013 North Carolina Trout Resources Management Plan identified increasing public access and habitat protection as two primary program areas. The funds generated from the sale of this special license plate will support projects to pursue permanent easements or property acquisition to conserve brook trout and provide angling access. Funds also may be used to remove or replace stream barriers for brook trout passage, stabilize stream banks to limit sedimentation and limit the effects of acid deposition in high-elevation streams.

Mountain trout fishing is an important component of North Carolina's economy. Based on a 2008 report, North Carolina had 92,789 mountain trout anglers who had a total economic output of $174 million. To print an application for the Native Brook Trout license plate, go to ncwildlife.org/Fishing.

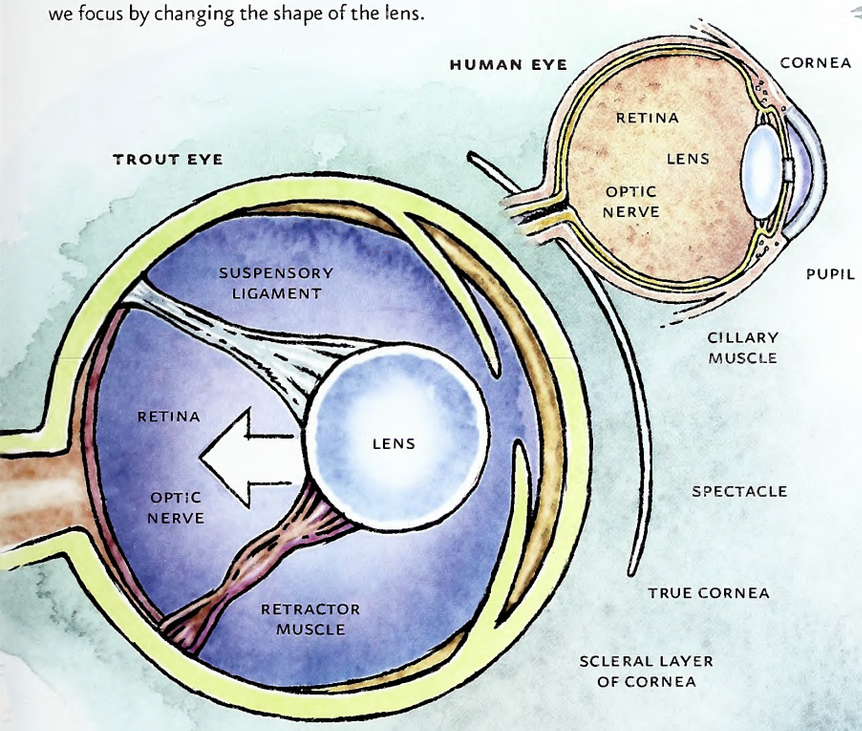
How Well Do Trout See?

written by Clyde Sorenson
illustrated by Jim Brown

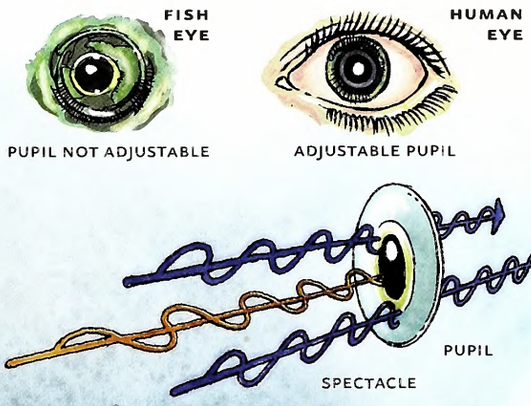


LIKE MOST SUCCESSFUL NORTH CAROLINA TROUT ANGLERS, I know that most times the secret to catching these beautiful fish in our spectacular, but nutrient-poor Native Trout waters is not scaring them in the first place. Trout have good vision, and actually can detect some things that we can't — but understanding what they can and can't see can make them more approachable.

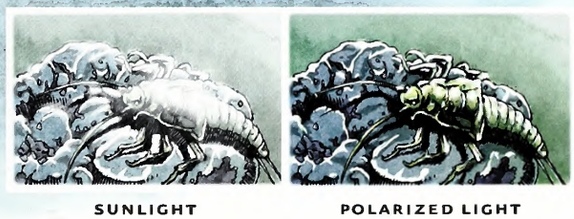
A trout's eyes are fundamentally very similar to ours, with a couple of important differences. First, the lens of a fish is almost round, as opposed to our much more flattened lens. A round lens refracts light better in an aquatic environment. A trout's eye has much poorer resolving power than a human eye, so minute things that would look sharp and distinct to us will look fuzzy to a trout. In order to focus on an object, the trout moves its lens in or out with respect to the retina. In our eyes, we focus by changing the shape of the lens.



Second, the pupil of a fish's eye doesn't change appreciably in response to changes in light intensity, as ours do. Fish eyes can adapt to bright light to some extent by retracting the light sensitive rods in the retina, but this ability is probably limited compared to the contraction of our pupils. Trout like shadows because they can't be seen as well by predators, and they can see better themselves. Trout can probably detect much lower light levels than we can, though.



Trout apparently can detect the polarization of sunlight in the water, which is something we can't do. Detecting polarization could be important in setting circadian rhythms. They also have excellent color perception. They can see the entire spectrum we see, and young trout can detect the ultraviolet reflection of their planktonic prey as well!



Cabin Fever

written by Jim Dean

Even for those who aren't overly fond of cold weather, winter doesn't usually begin to wear out its welcome around here until after Christmas. November and December are typically busy months. Some of us are taking advantage of the last waning days of pleasant weather, while others are making shopping lists, beginning to pull decorations out the attic and contemplating the all-too-soon arrival of that bearded, carmine-clad gentleman from the far north.

JIM DEAN

But after New Year's Day, some of us find that our merriment has vanished in a bilious haze, and we are looking ahead at a vast wasteland of outdoor inactivity until the calendar flips through several months. This is not altogether true of those who ski, snowboard, hunt or enjoy other outdoor winter sports, but even these hardy folks often find that late winter and a dismally extended spring can outlast their enthusiasm.

At some point, almost all of us contract some level of what is known as "cabin fever," and we don't have to live in Nome, Alaska to catch it, either.

"At some point, almost all of us contract some level of what is known as "cabin fever," and we don't have to live in Nome, Alaska to catch it, either."

Many of my favorite places in the world typically experience winters that may last the better part of nine months. In Idaho on the Henry's Fork where I fish for trout every year, dependably warm weather may not arrive until mid-June, and by late September — and certainly mid-October — prospects for a fine, comfortable day can be dicey. I have been in snow, sleet and hail storms in that country every summer month (this past mid-June, I landed in a snow shower having left 99-degree temperatures in Raleigh).

If some folks relish winter weather, others take it personally. Case in point. On June 1, this past year, Yellowstone National Park rangers reported that a Canadian man driving a stolen official Parks Canada pickup truck had failed to stop at the Park's northern entrance. The driver had merely flashed a friendly "peace" sign as he drove through the gate. Yellowstone rangers caught him five miles south at Mammoth Hot Springs.

The driver had stolen the truck in Banff National Park on May 30 and, somewhere between Alberta and Montana, he took a dirt road that by-passed the border checkpoint. The driver's explanation was that he had decided that he was going to drive south until he reached somewhere that was warm.

He was clearly suffering from an advanced case of "cabin fever," the classic symptoms of extended heat and light deprivation that afflict winter-weary bones, resulting in desperation and distorted judgment.

I have not heard what became of the truck driver, but it might be inconsiderate to send the poor soul to jail (except maybe in Miami). More likely, I'm betting he paid a fine or got a sympathetic warning and was shipped back to Alberta (possibly in that truck with the heat cranked up full blast).

As for me, the seemingly endless post-holiday stretch of dreary weather results in a predictable pattern. I may start out with good intentions to use my time more or less constructively by writing, painting watercolors, working on a wooden ship model, tying flies, working out regularly in a gym (yeah, right), and that sort of thing. But sooner or later, these good intentions are replaced by an increased amount of idle piddling. I also tend to do a lot of reading, but my chosen subject matter wouldn't impress my old English professors.

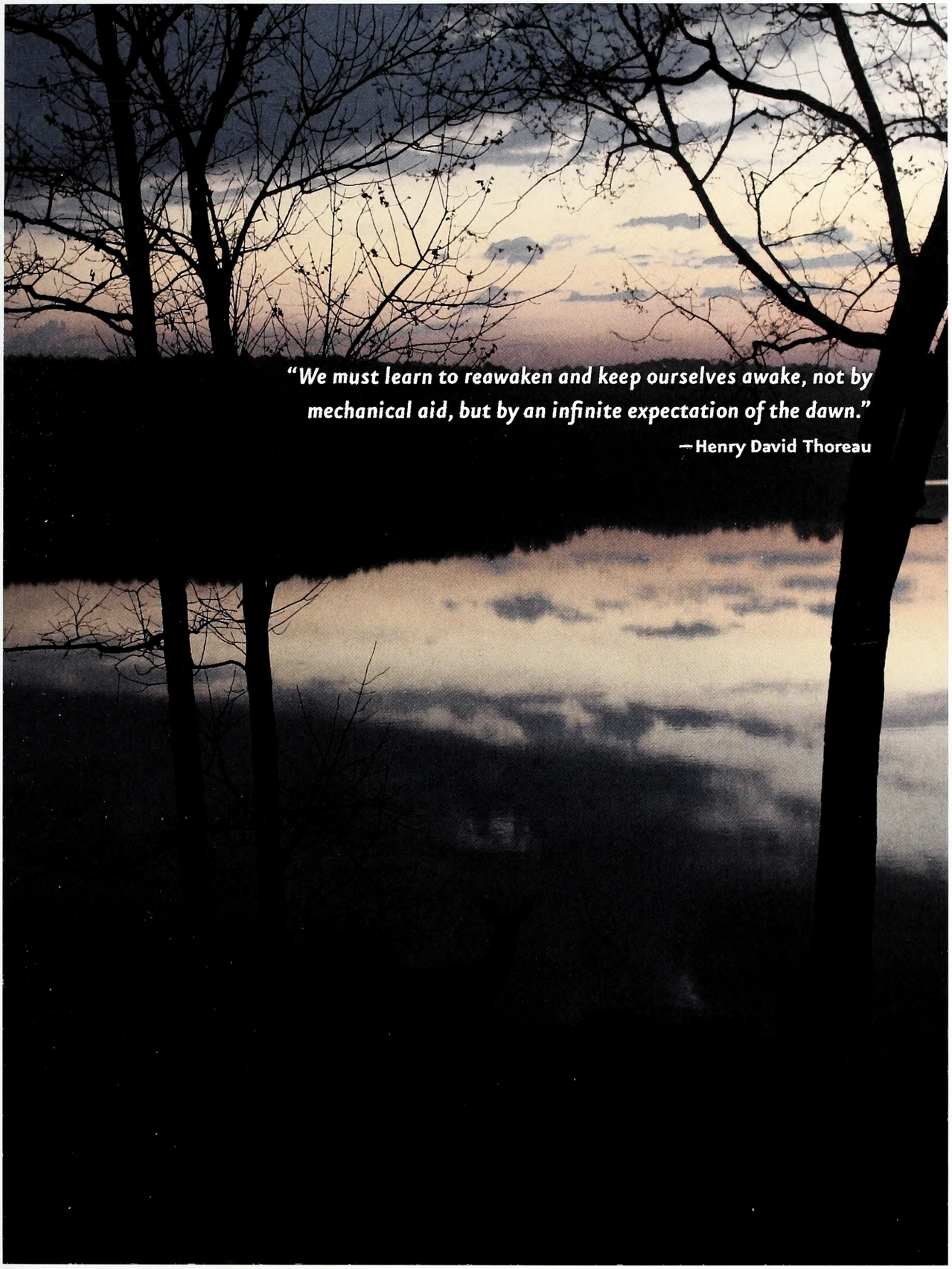
By March, my sofa will have sagged into a rump-sprung imprint of my posterior, and days may pass before I even summon the energy to vacuum up the detritus of multiple bags of potato chips and Cheetos. I whimper pitifully whenever a Corona commercial appears on the TV with babes in bikinis lying in hammocks under palm trees.

Over the years, I have often celebrated a truly magnificent summer day on the water by whimsically asking my companions what we would be willing to pay to recreate that experience in February. And now that I am semi-retired — "semi" because I like to think I am still working — I can answer that question. It costs somewhere between $2,500 and $5,000 (see below).

That ain't cheap, and especially for someone living on a retirement pension and social security. However, my son, Scott, and daughter, Susan, have demonstrated remarkable forbearance on this issue. "You took care of us, got us educated and prepared us to look after ourselves," they have told me. "If you need an occasional break from winter, go for it."

This carte-blanche permission to spend sizeable chunks of their meager inheritance is very generous, and it has allowed me, with a relatively free conscience, to make occasional off-season forays to Belize, Mexico, and other Caribbean destinations.

If there is a better cure for "cabin fever" than stalking bonefish and permit with a fly rod in one hand and a Corona in the other while wading knee-deep in an aqua palette of warm water under a brilliant bowl of puffy clouds, I haven't found it. Thanks, guys. Could you pick me up at the airport?



S.P. MURRAY

Deer silhouette at Lake Rogers, Granville County

OUTDOOR MOMENT

IN THE JANUARY · FEBRUARY ISSUE

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BEST IN SHOW
We present the winners of our 10th annual photo competition. See more than 30 great photos representing 10 categories.

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Although their numbers are not huge in North Carolina, brant provide a different sort of hunting for those accustomed to Canada geese.

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